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DORIS LESSING'S BELIEF IN WHOLENESS
OF THE SELF AND COSMIC
HARMONY

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Ao meu pai.

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ABSTRACT

The counterculture movements of the 1960's in the U.S. and in Europe revealed new and radical ways of approaching human relationships, political systems and the environment. In the novels *The Golden Notebook* (1962), *The Four-Gated City* (1969) and *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), twentieth-century British writer Doris Lessing proposed a change in the usual ways of perceiving the world. Along with Ronald D. Laing, an unorthodox British psychiatrist and cultural theoretician, Lessing revolutionized the concepts of schizophrenia, of the divided self and of the voyage to inner space and time.

The purpose of my study is to trace the development of Lessing's way of perceiving the divided self and of transforming it in an authentic recognition of human and universal duality. In her view, we have to work on our duality so that we are able to understand the human being's totality in a new way. The attempt to reach a "sweet sanity of we" becomes difficult when the equal dignity among human beings is neglected. In her three novels, Lessing questions the psychiatric knowledge and practice which confine, frighten and regulate the life of human beings. In order to recognize the development in the protagonists' way of understanding the self and the world, I decided to follow a chronological order in the study of Lessing's works.

The findings of my investigation have led me to the

recognition of the protagonists' deep necessities of self-knowledge. In *The Golden Notebook*, Anna Wulf is able to work with the two women she is and live with them harmoniously. *The Four-Gated City* shows the necessities of merging a self with another one so that the protagonists, Lynda Coldridge and Martha Quest, can learn about the universe. The fusion of two opposed identities can revolutionize all ways of living. In *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, Charles is absorbed by a Crystal in the voyage in and through this experience of unification he is able to understand the necessity of harmony between opposite forces. Lessing does not see any hope in hierarchical relationships. For Lessing the human being's development and the survival of the planet are intimately linked to the understanding of the equal dignity of people, of the healthy concept of group, community and cosmos.

RESUMO

A década de 60 foi rica em movimentos contraculturais e em propostas inovadoras em relação a temas como relacionamentos humanos, novas formas de organização política e proteção ao meio-ambiente. Em *The Golden Notebook* (1962), *The Four-Gated City* (1969) e *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), a escritora inglesa Doris Lessing também propôs uma mudança nas maneiras habituais de se compreender o mundo. Ela revolucionou os conceitos de esquizofrenia, eu dividido e viagem ao interior do ego juntamente com um anti-psiquiatra e teórico cultural inglês, Ronald D. Laing.

O propósito do meu estudo é o de traçar um desenvolvimento na maneira da autora perceber o eu dividido e transformá-lo no autêntico reconhecimento da dualidade humana e universal. Esta dualidade precisa ser conhecida, na opinião de Doris Lessing, para que se chegue a uma nova maneira de compreender a totalidade do ser humano. A tentativa de se chegar a uma "doce sanidade do nós" pode ser dificultada no momento em que a igualdade entre os seres humanos é prejudicada. Em seus três livros, Lessing questiona os ensinamentos e a prática psiquiátricos que confinam, amendrontam e regulam a vida do ser humano. O estudo das obras foi feito em uma sequência cronológica para que, nas maneiras de perceber o eu e o mundo, houvesse a percepção do desenvolvimento das personagens principais.

As conclusões das análises levaram ao conhecimento da

profunda necessidade dos protagonistas desenvolverem o auto-conhecimento. Em *The Golden Notebook*, Anna Wulf consegue trabalhar com as duas mulheres que são ela mesma de maneira a conviver com elas de forma rica e profunda. *The Four-Gated City* nos mostra a necessidade de se mergulhar na identidade de outra pessoa para se chegar ao conhecimento do próprio universo. A fusão de duas identidades opostas pode revolucionar todas as maneiras de se viver. Já em *Briefing*, Charles Watkins é absorvido por um Cristal na viagem ao fundo do ego e, através desta experiência de unificação, é capaz de compreender a necessidade da harmonia entre os opostos. Lessing não projeta nenhuma esperança nas relações hierárquicas. Para ela, o desenvolvimento humano e a sobrevivência do planeta estão necessariamente ligados à compreensão da dignidade dos seres humanos, do conceito saudável de grupo, comunidade e cosmos.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

Much attention has been given in literature to people who explore in the deep ocean fragments of a wrecked ship, to people who climb the highest peaks and mountains to prove resistance and courage, to people who travel alone through distant oceans and through the outer space toward other planets. However, these are not the only worthy projects a human being has to join. According to Doris Lessing, twentieth-century British novelist, and R. D. Laing, unorthodox psychiatrist and cultural theoretician, an urgent and important project is required in our time - the journey to explore the inner time and space of consciousness.

Doris Lessing is aware in *The Golden Notebook* (1962),¹ *The Four-Gated City* (1969)² and *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971)³ of the necessities of travelling and of entering and understanding new spaces through the protagonists experiences with the voyage in. The protagonists, in their voyages, sense and test the solidity and fragility of walls, achieve understanding of the fragmentary reality of persons and groups through dreams and nightmarish visions, and reestablish a contact with their selves through the knowledge of the necessities of re-turning to a cosmic harmony.

In the three works mentioned, Lessing portrays necessities and preparations for the voyage in through the aspect of

division. The split between body and mind, crude and finished forms, inner and outer cities, and creative and destructive spirals is part of a reality which demonstrates not only the suffering brought by violence and fear of the times but also the wish to build something out of destruction. The voyage in allows the change, the movement and the discovery that it is possible to find and reconcile what has been lost in terms of human relationships and personal knowledge. It opens up a way for the confrontation of frightening forces of hatred and terror but, at the same time, it forces the individual to transcend the experience and find a new order. Many times the reconciliation of divided experiences such as terror and joy presupposes the presence of a guide and friend. In the three novels, Lessing uses psychotherapy to show its social function in the sense of guiding individuals. Unfortunately, psychotherapy very rarely succeeds because of the therapist's lack of comprehension, time and mainly love. Usually, the voyager is classified as schizophrenic which, consequently, transforms her/his life into a continuous act of starting and finishing therapy as well as entering and leaving mental hospitals. Lessing's three novels, in this sense, call for a transformation in the way of relating to people and question the future of the planet if the knowledge of the self and of cosmic harmony is not achieved.

Very similar discussions about the divisions of the self, about the voyage in and also about schizophrenia are present, during the sixties, in the works of an unorthodox British psychiatrist called Ronald D. Laing. Both Laing and Lessing share similar concepts of madness and sanity during this decade -

concepts which interpret reality and at the same time revolutionize the order of things. Elaine Showalter analyzes in *The Female Malady* the tradition of England as "the global headquarters of insanity".⁴ In the chapter dedicated to Laing, she presents him as the authority in the English antipsychiatry movement:

With the publication of *The Divided Self*, in 1960, he became the mentor of the counterculture in all of its political, psychedelic, mystical, and especially artistic manifestations. His books provided texts for the New Left, the drug culture, and the Eastern religious revival, as well as for the nascent women's movement. Laing's concepts of madness and sanity, the self, and the Other pervade some of the most important English writing of the decade.⁵

In Lessing, the way characters are diagnosed as schizophrenic and the kind of visionary attitude these patients have towards life intrigues the reader at the first reading. The contradiction between the doctor's diagnosis and the patient's prophetic power creates such an abyss that it is evident, for Lessing, that only a mutual understanding and an extension of the meaning of love can bridge it. The schizophrenic's more sensitive apprehension of reality implies change, a transformation of the usual ways of living in fragments, in compartments.

Laing and Lessing stress not only the situation of the human being in the collectivity but also, and especially, the potentialities of children and of people who live harmoniously with nature and with themselves. So, I decided to study the person, the groups and society's sick behavior according to Laing's view in order to better understand Lessing's world and

fundament her ideas in a psychological context. I see Laing as a consistent contributor to the analysis of power and control institutionalized by society through psychiatry. Laing is aware of the danger of confining those who break rules in mental hospitals and acknowledges the tendency, among many people, to create defences out of fear of everybody.

Both Lessing and Laing develop their interpretation of schizophrenia during the sixties and move from a concept of schizophrenia as a strong resistance to the general order of submission to social rules to a concept not only of higher and visionary sanity but also of a revolutionary way of seeing and understanding space such as houses, cities and the universe. The change from one vision to the other will be pointed out in the study of the three novels in each of the following chapters. But a general and close overview of Laing's studies about the characterization of the person, the function of experiencing and behaving, the relation between behavior and action, and between being and non-being in the context of experiencing, behaving and acting will help in the understanding of society's sickness during the sixties and will clarify why he changed from one view of schizophrenia to the other. Laing's two works published in the 60s will be basic for our analysis: *The Divided Self*⁶, published in 1960, and *The Politics of Experience*⁷, published in 1967.

When Laing starts analysing the concept of personhood, he first questions the possibility of the existence of persons: "Can human beings be persons today? Can a man be his actual self with another man or woman?" (TPE, p.23). Laing defines a person as a center of experience and origin of actions and has a curious way

of relating experience to behavior:

When two (or more) persons are in relation, the behavior of each towards the other is mediated by the experience by each of the other, and the experience of each is mediated by the behavior of each. There is no contiguity between the behavior of one person and that of the other. Much human behavior can be seen as a unilateral or bilateral attempt to eliminate experience. A person may treat another as though he were not a person, and he may act himself as though he were not a person. There is no contiguity between one person's experience and another's. My experience of you is always mediated through your behavior. Behavior that is the direct consequence of impact, as of one billiard ball hitting another, or experience directly transmitted to experience, is not personal. (TPE, p.25)

So, when Laing says: "My experience is not inside my head. My experience of this room is out there in the room" (TPE, p.21), he links what most of people divide into inner and outer worlds.

But Laing sees that "persons" are difficult to find. Our condition is one of alienation and insensitivity to what we and the others are.

We will find no intelligibility in behavior if we see it as an in-essential phase in an essentially inhuman process. We have had accounts of men as animals, men as machines, men as biochemical complexes, with certain ways of their own, but there remains the greatest difficulty in achieving a human understanding of man in human terms. (TPE, p.28-9)

Laing considers our "normality" as a very destructive and corruptive way of relating to people: "What we call "normal" is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection and other forms of destructive action on experience"

(TPE, p.27). Behavior therapy, for instance, is a technique of manipulation and control, which favors the behavior rather than the experience of the patient.

Any technique concerned with the other without the self, with behavior to the exclusion of experience, with the relationship to the neglect of the persons in relation, with the individuals to the exclusion of their relationships, and most of all, with an object-to-be changed rather than a person-to-be accepted, simply perpetuates the disease it purports to cure. (TPE, p.53)

It is only through action that a change can occur. Laing calls this process transactional experience and believes in it as the only way to prevent our annihilation. The capacity of interaction happens because of our ability of creation, of construction upon the given, which can be either positive or negative. According to Sartre, as quoted by Laing, the human being "does not create being but rather injects non-being into the world, into an original plentitude of being" (TPE, p.37). In fact, few people have had the ability to create something out of no-thing, of a zone of silence which is the pre-condition of any attempt at being. You have to reach the source, "the fathomless and bottomless groundlessness of everything" (TPE, p.38). Some people who become aware of the non-being of what we take to be being, our pseudo-values, pseudo-realities, pseudo-wants, give us "in our present epoch the acts of creation that we despise and crave" (TPE, p.43). Through the voyage in, these persons have trodden and known "the path to the end of time, the end of space, the end of darkness, and the end of light" (TPE, p.45). There are others who live in a state of non-being, where this zone of

nothing really means emptiness, silence, and is not a source of relation. And Laing points out that people who have trodden this path in a region of silence do not meet only emptiness. An analogy with music in Laing's *Sobre Loucos e Sãos*, published in Italy in 1979, helps us to realize the richness and suggestiveness behind simple sounds and melodies:

Ouvindo Bach, ou qualquer outra música, você começa a ouvir as notas... Aquilo a que você reage, e que traduz a seu modo, é a relação entre as notas, e não as notas por si mesmas... E qual é o oposto do som? Obviamente, o silêncio. O fato é, portanto, que as notas criam uma ilusão cintilante, formando o silêncio em tramas, ou módulos diferentes.⁸

He concludes by saying that "o que o tecido sonoro revela é o oceano do silêncio. E este oceano - isto é, simplesmente uma trama de silêncio - também é a pré-condição da linguagem".⁹ Consequently, "the ground of being of all things is the relation between them" (TPE, p.41). It is only when we reach a place of nothing and a zone of silence that our being is not only conscious but also active. Only through this experience is it possible to see, hear, touch and love in a never experienced way. Then, the actions do not stand isolated but are part of a conscious attempt to unify and integrate what has been fragmented.

Laing also recognizes a rhetoric of morality and a mystification of experience among groups which insist on compartmentalizing people and their necessities. The employment of a vocabulary and of definitions, for instance, that masquerade what is really happening reminds him of Orwell's time: "The

choice of syntax and vocabulary is a political act that defines and circumscribes the manner in which "facts" are to be experienced. Indeed, in a sense it goes further and even creates the facts that are studied" (TPE, p.62). The education of children is another example of the impingement of ideologies. Laing criticizes the ways that adults act on the children's experience: "Specifically this devastation is largely the work of violence that has been perpetrated on each of us, and by each of us on ourselves. The usual name that much of this violence goes under is love" (TPE, p.59). The destruction of experience is opening up a way to the destruction of everything. "Only by the most outrageous violation of ourselves have we achieved our capacity to live in relative adjustment to a civilization apparently driven to its own destruction" (TPE, p.76).

When Laing talks about the ghosts in our civilization, he considers basically the falsity and unreality of the relationships. We are ghosts to other people who are ghosts in our lives. Solitude can be found among people who talk about everyone, everywhere but who are, in fact, inessential, nowhere.

Each person, not being himself either to himself or the other, just as the other is not himself to himself or to us, in being another for another neither recognizes himself in the other, nor the other in himself. Hence being at least a double absence, haunted by the ghost of his own murdered self, no wonder modern man is addicted to other persons, and the more addicted, the less satisfied, the more lonely. (TPE, p.74)

We are lonely in our community, in our groups and insist on being and creating out of this loneliness.

Laing classifies our individuality in three basic

categories: the Other, Them, and Us. When we think about the Other, for instance, we are talking about someone without a personal characteristic. We are simply transferring guilt and responsibility to a "thing" which at the same time annoys, makes us resent its presence wherever it is:

The Other that governs everyone is everyone in his position, not of self, but as other. Every self, however, disavows being himself that other that he is for the Other. The Other is nothing because of the other. The other is everywhere elsewhere.
(TPE, p. 92)

Laing also connects our actions and experiences to Them: "We act not only in terms of our own experience, but of what we think they experience, and how we think they think we experience, and so on in a logically vertiginous spiral to infinity" (TPE, p. 78-9). We are part of a group that acts on us and which, at the same time, does not allow us to act differently: "Yet although I can make no difference, I cannot act differently" (TPE, p. 84). We are part of a mechanism, "one of them", which sees the other as "one of them". And this lack of unity and absence of true relationships shapes a kind of pattern which is difficult to break. We conform to a pre-established mould. We are parts of a pre-designed mosaic and fit to a respective place. How can we dare not fit into the place? There is no freedom when we conform to this kind of omnipotent presence: "In this collection of reciprocal indifference, of reciprocal inessentiality and solitude, there appears to exist no freedom. There is conformity to a presence that is everywhere elsewhere" (TPE, p. 84). Charles Watkins, the protagonist of *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*,

realizes in the voyage in the same ideas about the terrible catastrophe that the divorce between the "I" and the "we" provokes.

Some sort of a divorce there has been somewhere along the long path of this race of man between the "I" and the "we", some sort of a terrible falling away, and I (who am not I, but part of a whole composed of other human beings as they are of me) hovering here as if between the wings of a great white bird, feel as if I am spinning back (though it may be forwards, who knows?) yes spinning back into a vortex of terror, like a birth in reverse, and it is towards a catastrophe, yes, that was when the microbes, the little broth that is humanity, was knocked senseless, hit for six, knocked out of their true understanding, so that ever since most have said I, I, I, I, I, I, I and cannot, save for a few say we. Yes, but what awful blow or knock? What sent us off centre and away from the sweet sanity of we? (p.103)

This "sweet sanity of we" is Lessing's and Laing's starting point of transformation. If something is lost, we need to recover the sense of group that no longer exists. We think always about ourselves without noticing Them. Everyone is "one of Them". No one is "one of Us" since our "Us" is too false, too unreal. What we need is to discover what everyone in his individuality is, and not live as if only my "I" existed. Without experiencing what everyone does - in this "sweet sanity of We" - nobody will act and share what is common, what is vital for our living. Our "We", so impersonal, so abstract, so far away from what "we" should do, has to be replaced by a conscious and sane "they are one with us".

It is just possible that a further transformation is possible if men can come to experience themselves as "One of Us". If, even on the basis of the crassest self-interest, we can realize that

We and They must be transcended in the totality of the human race, if we in destroying them are not to destroy us all. (TPE, p.98)

So, according to Laing, every relationship depends on the way I see the other. I can see her/him as a person or as an organism. According to existential phenomenology, Laing sees value in man's existence and in his being in the world: "My thesis is limited to the contention that the theory of man as person loses its way if it falls into an account of man as a machine or man as an organismic system of it-processes" (TDS, p.23). Laing illustrates with an example of a patient with catatonic excitement: "One may see his behavior as 'signs' of a 'disease'; one may see his behavior as expressive of his existence" (TDS, p.31). And Laing emphasizes the way we see the other, and says that we tend not to do it with the heart. We tend to see the other as an object of our study and do not leave open the possibility of understanding the patient, of loving her/him. With the patient and psychiatrist, for instance, there has to be a dynamics such as the one between hieroglyphics and the interpreter. But with a psychotic the difficulty exists because of the disjunctive relationship he/she has with the other. The psychotic is tested according to the degree of conjunction or disjunction he/she has when compared to normal people. The schizophrenic person reacts with fear towards this world which classifies her/him. The individual uses other ways to deal with himself and with the other which Laing names engulfment, implosion and petrification. The individual engulfs himself/herself by fear of being understood, implodes by feeling emptiness, and petrifies when dealing with people who become

tiresome or disturbing. Laing says that one of the psychotic's characteristics is "To consume oneself by one's own love" because it "prevents the possibility of being consumed by the other" (TDS, p.51).

The Divided Self, published in 1960, portrays Laing's preoccupation with the way people are protecting themselves from others. As a consequence of the attempts to protect the self, the schizophrenic people experience themselves as primarily split into body and mind. To the person with an embodied self, the body is a base from which he/she can be a person and relate to others. To the person with a disembodied self, the body is an object among others and the core of a false self with a detached, disembodied inner, true self. This disembodied self is an onlooker at all the body does, the observer, critic and controller. There are advantages to the individual since the true self is safe and a supposed freedom, self-sufficiency and control exist: "He withdraws within a central citadel. But the paradox is that the more the self is defended, the more it is destroyed" (TDS, p.77). When the individual maintains her/his self embodied, what the self perceives is real, the thoughts and feeling are alive, there is a center and the actions are genuine. When a false self is embodied and the true self becomes disembodied, the world is experienced as unreal, false, futile and meaningless. In fantasy the self is omnipotent and free but "Phantasy can be so destructive that the world and the self can be reduced to dust and ashes" (TDS, p.85). In the schizophrenic state, the world is in ruins, and the self is apparently dead. What destroys is this cruel scrutiny: "The schizoid individual exists under the black

sun, the evil eye, of his own scrutiny... Everything withers under it" (TDS, p.122). When the false-self system becomes more and more extensive, autonomous, the unreality, falsity and death in life grow, as well. With the passing of time the schizophrenic starts living in a constant threat of non-being. With regard to Laing's studies at the beginning of the sixties, the critic Showalter points out the influence of social forces on the decisive development of his vision: "He was struck by the similarity between problems diagnosed as pathological and the permanent and profound human dilemmas of alienation expressed in existentialist and modernist writing".⁹

In 1967, the publication of The Politics of Experience reflects Laing's new perspectives on the study of schizophrenia. The condition is a diagnosis, a label applied by those who do not consider themselves mad: "it does establish as a social fact that the person labeled is One of Them" (TPE, p.120). "We" distort the experimental drama "One of Them" is living and very rarely let this broken heart be mended. Meanwhile,

It is hardly surprising that the person in his terror may stand in curious postures in an attempt to control the irresolvably contradictory social "forces" that are controlling him... that he tries in short to protect himself from destruction by every means that he has, by projection, introjection, splitting, denial and so on. (TPE, p.117).

In this broken world of the schizophrenic we ask which forces will prevail - those of breakdown or those of break-through. Laing sees the importance of the experience of madness but acknowledges its danger: "It is potentially

liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death" (TPE, p.133). But it has to be worked through. There is no way to avoid the experience when it will open up a new space and dynamicize the way of seeing the other, of behaving towards the group, of acting in favor of unity and harmony. And this is the experience of breakthrough. Everything depends on the way the person organizes what is broken and on how he/she turns this fragmented material into something meaningful. Laing describes the entering into newness in a mystic way which reflects the association of the voyage in to insight and prophecy: "One enters the other world by breaking a shell: or through a door: through a partition: the curtains part or rise: a veil is lifted. Seven veils, seven seals, seven heavens" (TPE, p.139).

He sees the experience of breakthrough as associated to the search for the definition of true sanity in a world of pseudo-realities and pseudo-definitions. Our capacity to conform is responsible for the fear of trying something new and for the lack of perception that new regions really exist: "Sanity today appears to rest very largely on a capacity to adapt to the external world, and the realm of human collectivities" (TPE, p.141). Laing proposes a modification in the way we see and perceive the external world. Our organismic studies will neither solve nor open up ways for the real necessities of mankind. In the following quotation, Laing exposes the process that modifies the relation of the person with other human beings. It is a process that dignifies the individual and which will be present throughout Lessing's three novels:

True sanity entails in one way or another the

dissolution of the normal ego, that false self system completely adjusted to our alienated social reality; the emergence of the "inner" archetypal mediators of divine power, and through this death a rebirth, and the eventual reestablishment of a new kind of ego-functioning, the ego now being the servant of the divine, no longer its betrayer. (TPE, p.145).

Associated to the process of dissolution and rebirth, children and the interexperiential relationship in psychotherapy become fundamental for the survival of humanity. Laing sees that "yet if nothing else, each time a new baby is born there is a possibility of reprieve" (TPE, p.30). It is curious to observe that Laing associates an aspect of divinity to children: Each child is a new being, a potential prophet, a new spiritual prince, a new spark of light precipitated into the outer darkness. Who are we to decide it is hopeless? (TPE, p.30). In *The Four-Gated City*, Lessing similarly presents Joseph Batts as the child who has the spiritual vision to cultivate the generosity and harmony mankind so urgently needs.

For both Laing and Lessing what makes an individual whole is the nature of his/her relationship with the other. In psychotherapy, for instance, the relation between patient and therapist is something basic for the progress in the dialogue and in understanding. Laing has faith in a psychotherapy that considers the transexperience: "Psychotherapy must remain an obstinate attempt of two people to recover the wholeness of being human through the relationship between them" (TPE, p.53). When we start rediscovering our personal worlds, we first discover ruins. The psychotherapeutic relationship becomes a re-search. It may start painfully: "We hope to share the experience of a

relationship, but the only honest beginning, or even end, may be to share the experience of its absence" (TPE, p.56).

Laing emphasizes the wrong directions which have been taken by psychiatry when "they" try to suppress the experience with the voyage in: "Can we not see that this voyage is not what we need to be cured of, but that it is itself a natural way of healing our own appalling state of alienation called normality? (TPE, p.167). We need orientation or, in Laing's words, we need to know where the orient is, the origin and source of our experience. This place can only be found when we take a perilous but necessary voyage:

In this particular type of journey, the direction we have to take is back and in, because it was way back that we started to go down and out. They will say we are regressed and withdrawn and out of contact with them. True enough, we have a long, long way to go back to contact the reality we have all long lost contact with. And because they are humane, and concerned, and even love us, and are very frightened, they will try to cure us. They may succeed. But there is still hope that they will fail. (TPE, p.168).

Cure in Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, *The Four-Gated City* and *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* is always associated to the impingement of truth by psychotherapists upon patients. It characterizes a system of established conformity and security. But Lessing innovates and modifies the concepts of sanity and madness in a similar way to Laing's. During the sixties, her protagonists are the labeled schizophrenics who contest diagnoses by fully exploring their shallowness and depths, by living both the experience of breakdown and breakthrough. The division which is inherent in their condition is not neglected but transcended

into a new structure and order in life. There is no way to separate Laing from Lessing in this effort to better human relationships and to question, for the benefit of humanity, the routes to the future. The voyage in and the divided self are these common points that converge the attention of human beings to the destruction and annihilation of experience maintained by governors, sectarians, psychiatrists, families and individuals upon individuals. Annis Pratt, in the introduction to Doris Lessing: Critical Essays, says:

Like the decade following the French Revolution, the sixties became a time in which an idealistic dawn of the Washington March was followed by the Jacobin Riots of Watts, Newark, and Detroit, which illustrated the inexorable conjunction of violence and chaos within even the most humanistic of reform schemes. It was precisely this tightrope between idealism and reality, between utopian left-wing visions and human depravity, that Lessing's heroes walked open-eyed, wryly and compassionately commenting upon the havoc.¹⁰

I would say that the tightrope is indeed an appropriate image for Lessing's protagonists willingness not to give up in spite of divisions and differences. To that I would add, however, the image of the Crystal which stands for Lessing's search for a desirable state of transparency. The purpose of this thesis is not only to analyze Laing's and Lessing's similarities and change of attitude toward schizophrenia during the sixties but also to show that Lessing organizes her experiences with division in the three novels and moves and transcends from the submersion into division to a state of transparency expressed by a Crystal form.

But before undertaking the analysis of division and schizophrenia, as well as the voyages themselves, I want to

discuss three critical articles which have been extremely important in my investigation of Lessing in relation to laingian ideas. In a chapter of longer study, "'A Rehearsal for Madness': Hysteria as Sanity in *The Four-Gated City*", by Barbara Hill Rigney¹¹ and in the article "Doris Lessing and R.D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy", by Marion Vlastos¹², Laing's and Lessing's similarities are very carefully explored. In "Marxism and Madness: The Two Faces of Doris Lessing's Myth", Jean Pickering¹³ points to Jerusalem, the archetypal ideal city which, in her opinion, integrates Lessing's view of Marxism and madness.

Barbara Hill Rigney begins her chapter by quoting a passage from *The Four-Gated City*. Martha Quest Hesse, the owner of a psychotic mind, perceives the "normal" people in a very peculiar way. The condition of sleepwalking, of being locked in their own needs without considering any other person's thoughts, of being isolated inside 'their hideously defective bodies, behind their dreaming drugged eyes' (p.67) stands for a very curious perception of normality when apprehended by such a psychotic mind. Martha walks a lot in London, perceiving everywhere the way society is oblivious of its savagery, of its oppression. Being so hideous and self-protective, the body can only be a reflection of society's barbarism. Mark Coldridge, for instance, in his room covered with maps and headlines portrays the physical destruction perpetrated by humanity all over the planet.

As Rigney points out, both Lessing and Laing see the adjustment to such a reality not as normality but as a form of collective madness. The world in *The Four-Gated City* does not love. To Laing's question "Is experience of love possible?" the

answer is 'no'. Sex, love and marriage are only words which are part of a 'universal mockery' (p.71). Sex, is an impersonal force because people simply plug into each other. In marriage, people are simply using each other. The depersonalization of sex is an evident example of the need to protect the self. Martha avoids losing herself in sex because of the fear of the dissolution of the ego. Sally-Sarah, who does love, commits suicide because of the too pressing demands of a self which extends itself. What world is this and what has been our contribution for this state of affairs? Laing and Lessing see the recognition of our madness as a step towards a higher state of sanity.

Normality, for Laing and Lessing, is the negative and truly insane state because it implies the clinging to uncertain certainties and the dependence on a reality that is, in fact, unreal. To go mad in a positive sense is to give up all certainty, according to Laing and Lessing, to lose the distinct between the real and the not-real, between the self and the not-self. (p.74)

Rigney says further that Martha's "quest" is that of the search for this superior sanity "through a virtually self-conscious and planned inducement of hysteria" which "is thus a rehearsal for the madness which will lead to enlightenment" (p.75). Another way of finding true identity is by losing the self. Martha understands that the loss of self is the only way to reach sanity at the time she decides to live in the basement with the mysterious Lynda Coldridge. A kind of ritual establishes their communion: Lynda drinks milk from a broken saucer in an animal way and Martha drinks symbolically from the same saucer. Their confinement, therefore, is a way to investigate and sense

the walls of the mind. There is no need to escape the basement since the time has come for the confrontation with unknown regions inside the self. When Martha leaves her confinement, her senses are those of a resurrected and reborn person. But how can one relate hysteria with this new and powerful experience? "Just as Martha has perceived through her hysteria the ugliness of reality and of humanity, so she also deeply experiences, through the 'light of exiled truth', the physical beauty of the world" (p.84). Like her world, her self seems new.

The day was fresh and the world newly painted...
 She wanted to cry because it was so beautiful...
 She stood gazing up, up, until her eyes seemed
 absorbed in the crystalline substance of the sky
 with its clouds like snowbanks, she seemed to be
 streaming out through her eyes into the skies...
 (FGC, p.519)

But some of the nightmarish aspects of the experience also have to be mentioned. First, the fear of losing control; second, the presence of different tunes and wavelengths creating a field of sounds the character has to gain control of; and finally, the confrontation with the self-hater, "that evil in the schizophrenic self which balances or sometimes annihilates the good" (p.85). "Recognition of and confrontation with the 'self-hater' are, according to Lessing, prerequisites for knowledge of the divided self and the first steps to making it whole" (p.85). So, the experience comprises two regions that the traveller has to visit: one of joy and beauty and another of terror.

Martha considers the experiences of childhood as very important for the later adult life. She sees children as

possessors of sensitivity and perception which are dutifully demolished by the adults. Rigney mentions Laing's and Lessing's opinions on the subject: "Laing, like Lessing, sees children as irreparably damaged in the mother-child relationship which in present society, he says, is one of violence and devastation" (p.87). Rigney, then, presents, through Martha, the nonpossessive maternal love as the only solution for the lack of love in *The Four-Gated City*. The sensitive children who survive the catastrophe at the end of the novel are those who can create a new world, "one which might not sink into darkness and schizophrenia, but might remain whole, perceptive, undivided, like that world ruled by the gods and goddesses of Lessing's *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*" (p.88).

Rigney concludes her article by presenting Martha in her old age - "her hysteria is calmed, her self fully discovered and recognized, if not healed" (p.88). Martha suffered because of her hysteria but she helped to give birth to a non-possessive and potentially better world.

In "Doris Lessing and R.D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy", Marion Vlastos introduces a very important discussion about the ways to attack a social problem: should we reform the structure of society or shake the consciousness of people? According to Vlastos, in *The Golden Notebook*, published in the early sixties, Lessing portrays the disillusionment with communism and rejects it as unviable. Vlastos understands that: "With the collapse of hope in the political answer to human misery, the struggle for a viable existence becomes again the onus of the individual self and its capacities for creativity and

moral development" (p.245).

Human relationships are very difficult in *The Golden Notebook*. Lack of understanding of the other's needs creates barriers too troublesome to transpose. Anna Wulf, the protagonist, suffers from a writer's block and this fact illustrates the difficulties in relation not only with others but also with herself. Vlastos points to hope only in the descent into madness whose significance is shared by Anna Wulf and Saul Green. The idea of madness as revelation and cure is introduced in *The Golden Notebook* and deeply explored in *The Four-Gated City* and *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*.

Vlastos also stresses the problem of splitting and compartmentalization in society and sees that this situation is reflected in the individual life. The individual is sick because the world is sick. Anna is divided because of her different roles as a woman and her political and professional aspirations. Not even psychoanalysis helps. Vlastos sees the relationship between Mother Sugar (Mrs. Marks), the therapist, and Anna as one of pure consolation. Mother Sugar offers sugar. No patient can stand life with such an amount of energy. But it is through such a relationship that "Anna introduces the idea, to be strongly developed in *The City*, that the split person may be the forerunner of a new state in the evolution of man" (p.247).

Another similar idea between Laing and Lessing is that the denial of one side of the experience can produce harm to the other which is being explored. Anna wants to deny evil in herself which consequently develops and wants to possess her. From the vision of a peasant vase, of the madman Silva, of the dwarf - the

principle of "join in spite" -, Anna moves to a recognition of the evil in herself and in Saul. It is necessary to face these evil forces since "For Lessing there can be no separation of sensitive self from the horror of the world because the attitudes of the self form part of the malevolent forces that issue from the whole" (p.248). And for Laing:

It has always been recognised that if you split Being down the middle, if you insist on grabbing this without that, if you cling to the good without the bad, denying the one for the other, what happens is that the dissociated evil impulse, now evil in a double sense, returns to permeate and possess the good and turn it into itself.
(TPE, p.75)

Vlastos concludes that the psychic experience allows Anna self-respect and balance. However, she says that the novel does not fully explore the idea that madness is a solution for the world and that the psychotic mind is the only one that fully apprehends reality. This possibility is only hinted at.

It is in *The Four-Gated City* that Lessing shows a world much more directed to self-destruction. Mark Coldridge is the best example of a conscious mind concerning the self-annihilation: "By documenting areas of destruction and failure all over the earth, Mark is better able to see the world as a whole, to determine the true drift of man's intentions by fitting one fact with another" (p.249). Vlastos also comments on the compartmentalization applied by people who separate "Them" from "Us". Even the Coldridge house is an example of the division into layers where different people live and behave separately. But how are people seen when they perceive this separateness and manifest it to

others?

The tremendous irony described by Lessing and Laing and other contemporary writers on madness is that, while social behavior is based on the principle of compartmentalizing, splitting, certain people are forcibly seized and locked up in isolation from society for admitting the condition in themselves. (p.249)

This subject becomes very serious in *The Four-Gated City*. The doctor is powerful while the patient is helpless. For a patient who wants to be frank the consequences are even worse: "Drugs and shock relieve both patient and doctor of responsibility for the truth and ultimately, as the conclusions of *The City* and *Briefing* strongly suggest, of the responsibility for survival - both personal and generic" (p.250). "The typical psychoanalytic relationship is in itself inimical to a meaningful human experience and possible cure" (p.250). Vlastos presents the relation between Anna and Saul during the psychic experience, in *The Golden Notebook*, as Laing's ideal one. Mother Sugar's and Anna's debate, on the other hand, can "only result in a spiritual and intellectual deadlock" (p.251). Martha's and Lynda's experience, along with Anna's and Saul's, bears also a resemblance to Laing's basic therapeutic principles or methods. Martha decides to live sharing Lynda's view of the world and the physical space where this is possible: the basement.

Vlastos considers Martha's trips difficult, complex and also inconclusive as is the temporary stay at Paul's house, Mark's nephew. But they have a pattern: Martha's psychic ascents and descents. Martha faces the evil, the terrifying forces of the self-hater, of her depths and of the depths of all humanity. At

the time of her descent, Martha understands the necessity of maintaining Lynda in a drugged condition and in confinement - Lynda hears and sees what many people cannot and, since she is talking about her potentialities, she has to be kept in silence: "she was punished with doctors, hospitals, and shock treatments by a society terrified of the truth about itself" (p.252). But these friendly voices have an opportunity of being carefully listened to by Martha and also of being respected. At the time Martha comes up from the basement, she feels a new world. She wants to be united with natural beauty - sky, trees and clouds. "It is this movement of ascent in Martha's psychic experience that reveals a source for hope in the new breed of humanity rising from the ashes of the old" (p.252).

After the catastrophe, Martha lives with children who embody an "unearthly beauty and sweetness" (p.252). The natural beauty that Martha admires is part of this new and divine race. The children are the inhabitants of an island that has an element of the divine in it. Vlastos does not forget that Martha, Lynda and many people of their generation help to give sustenance to this new breed of people. Without the psychic experience, Martha and Lynda would not have had the strength to fight the enemies. But the world at the end of *The City* is not pacified. Many things have to be worked upon. "Despite the implications of evolution and of divinity in the novel, the question of the survival of the world rests on the very dubious nature of the present human race" (p.253). Mark Coldridge still dreams about the perfect city but recognizes that this generation has to start the work now.

Vlastos considers *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* "an

expansion of the two novels" (p.253) but also different in its form. A striking aspect is that of the coincidence of the last name of the main character, Charles Watkins, with the name of the sculptor Jesse Watkins, whose case Laing records in *The Politics of Experience*. Both Charles and Jesse undergo psychotic trips, as well. Vlastos, however, sees that the coincidences are not sufficient evidence of the agreement of both Lessing and Laing about the experience, since the two Watkins react differently towards it. But it is important to note that she recognizes that "The ultimate impulse, the ultimate question behind *Briefing* remains the same as for the other Lessing novels - the question of the survival of the world of humanity" (p.253).

Lessing uses a different strategy to judge humanity in *Briefing*. For the first time in her fiction it is done by nonhuman beings. The gods and goddesses of *Briefing* provide ordinary reality with a different light and perspective. The sin of humanity, for instance, is seen by the god Merk Ury as caused by the fact that:

[Humans] have not yet evolved into an understanding of their individual selves as merely parts of a whole, first of all humanity, their own species, let alone achieving a conscious knowledge of humanity as part of Nature, plants, animals, birds, insects, reptiles, all these together making a small chord in the Cosmic Harmony. (p.120)

Jesse Watkins and Charles Watkins also have an identification with the gods. Jesse's identification is "vicarious" (p.254) while "in Charles's vision it appears to be literal" (p.254).

But the essential question that arises is that which

concerns the divinity in Charles' life. Vlastos compares *The Golden Notebook* and *The Four-Gated City* with *Briefing* and concludes that in the first two novels "the point of psychic flight is the return to a world lit with new knowledge of itself" (p.255). In *Briefing* Charles confronts human evil, the Fall, symbolized by the bloody rituals of three women and the slaughtering of cattle. He acknowledges and accepts the evil side of humanity and its terrors but his mistake, according to Vlastos, is the desire to remain integrated to the Crystal wall and substances. Since he is part of this divine order he is "temporarily freed from the divisive agony of the normal human ego" (p.255). Charles is briefed for the descent into hell-earth but this proves a difficult task. Unlike Jesse, Charles "lacks the courage, or the imagination, to be fully schizophrenic, to recognize his strange simultaneous existence in both worlds and explore its meaning" (p.256). Jesse, on the other hand, clings to his real identity at the most terrifying moments. The way Charles lives is also very contradictory. Through letters the reader knows he is a professor of Classics. Rosemary Baines, a goddess on the planet, attends his lectures about the education of children and writes him a letter recognizing his impressive and positive influences on people. But Charles denies the potentialities that Baines recognizes. This is the reason for Vlastos' opinion that Charles is not the ideal god on the planet. And, consequently, Charles' and Jesse's return is not the same: "Having been true to his self, true to his humanity and the earth it inhabits, Jesse returns from his voyage not to a simple acceptance of social conformity, as Charles does, but to a

greater awareness of the inner reality of the world" (p.257). The psychic journeys by Jesse, Anna and Martha can be compared in the sense that these individuals expand the acquired knowledge when they come back. To Charles the world does not become a revelation.

In "Marxism and Madness: The Two Faces of Doris Lessing's Myth"; Jean Pickering points to the absence of conflict between Lessing's view of salvation through madness and salvation through Marxism. The shifts from "the politics of the left" in the first four novels of the Children of Violence series to "the politics of madness" in the last novel, *The Four-Gated City*, are built up progressively and organically. In fact, the underlying image that structures both views in the series is Jerusalem, the archetypal ideal city.

Jerusalem is, according to her, the goal that Martha persecutes in a political and personal way: "on the level of the collective, it represents an ideal state where all ages and races live together in harmony and beauty; on the level of the individual, it implies the wholeness of the self, the goal of individuation" (p.21). But Jerusalem cannot be understood without its counterpart - Armageddon, the dark side, "a shadow city of poverty and beastliness" (*FGC*, p.151). Pickering compares Martha's experiences with the voyage into new rooms to the chaos and conflict of Armageddon and concludes that the human being has to proceed inevitably in the direction of the shadow city in order to follow an evolutionary path. The shadows become a reality in Martha's outer life, as well. The nuclear holocaust shows that Armageddon has arrived. It is only after conflict,

death an destruction that Jerusalem and the mature children born on the island become a possibility.

The image of the house is also connected to the city. Quaternity, which relates both house and city, is very frequent in Lessing's novels and points to the search for integration. The house, which stands for the interior life, is also a place of divisions and its image "divided into rooms expresses the unity of the self; its complexity, and the difficulty of integration" (p.25). But Martha's journey opens new spaces into her own mind which "enlarge the house of herself" (p.26) - and also to humanity. Here we understand clearly Pickering's vision of the integration between madness and Marxism: "Her journey into strange rooms leads her, paradoxically enough, not merely to greater "I" ness, but to greater "we" ness too, for as she pushes further into the hidden recesses of her own being, she discovers that she makes contact with states of mind common to all humanity" (p.26).

By associating the house with the city, Pickering points to an evolutionary path in Lessing's vision of madness and Marxism. A city of harmony becomes a possibility when the rooms of experience keep open to the understanding of the nature of the shadow. It is evident, to Pickering, that "Jerusalem can only be built in the ashes of Armageddon" (p.28) and that both destruction and transformation, as well as politics and madness are parts of an organic connection.

The three articles point to the importance of the individual's confrontation with the self and with the quest of the survival of humanity. We can also notice that the three

critics stress the connection that Lessing establishes between the individual and the collective. Rigney emphasizes Martha's horror at the sight of hideous and half-completed human beings on the streets, and her change after confronting her own incompleteness in the voyage in. The critic argues that this voyage reveals the possibility of relationships based on respect and non-possessive feelings. Vlastos analyzes the importance of madness as revelation and cure without neglecting that this subject is linked to the survival of humanity. Lessing's "prophets" are potentially able to change relationships and the story of the planet as soon as they return from the voyage in. Pickering, on her turn, uses the image of the city in a successful attempt to unite Marxism and madness. She proves that only the knowledge of the self, of "one's rooms", enables the individual to envision a city of harmony and peace.

Besides these points in common, Rigney, Vlastos and Pickering stress different aspects which have been useful for my studies. Barbara H. Rigney points to Martha's nonpossessive love as an attitude of those who have learned to know themselves and their world. She recognizes that the children's survival on the island and the understanding of their supranormal abilities is only possible because of the consciousness of equal dignity among adults and children. The relation children-adults can be compared to Anna's and Saul's successful meeting and to Martha's and Lynda's voyage in. The presence of institutionalized power in Briefing, however, destroys Watkins' possibility of discovering his true identity.

In Vlastos' article, the relevant point for my studies is

the analysis of the return from the psychic voyages. Vlastos emphasizes a world full of potentialities after the return in *The Golden Notebook* and the *The Four-Gated City*, and contrasts this potentiality with the divinity that is realized and kept only during the voyage in *Briefing*. The contrastive aspects between *Briefing* and the other two novels allow, according to my point of view, a relevant and worthy analysis. However, Vlastos omits the most important reason for Charles's failure: the vision of the camellia and the inner and outer tendrils before submitting to shock treatment. Through this vision it becomes clear the importance of letting everything and everyone grow. The outer and inner tendrils try several times to reach the camellia but fail because time has not allowed this accomplishment. Vlastos does not mention that "Timing is the whole process" (BDH, p.245). In fact, this vision can be very helpful to the understanding of Charles' failure in realizing his true identity. In his efforts to remember, Lessing emphasizes not only the sleepy state the world is in but also the importance of time for the achievement of personal needs. In Charles' case, institutionalized power takes over and does not let him reach the camellia. The strong influence of psychoterapists is like a strong wind perpetrating the total annihilation of the impulse at reaching for the truth.

Jean Pickering shows that no knowledge about the self and the world can be achieved when the protagonists do not face their "rooms" and the painful experience of Armageddon. The ideal city becomes a possibility after the atomic holocaust and the voyage in. There is no way to separate both experiences in *The Four-Gated City*. The experience with contraries happens in *The*

Golden Notebook and in Briefing, as well, demonstrating the power of this experience in Lessing's works.

Through a chronological examination of *The Golden Notebook*, *The Four-Gated City* and *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, my intention is to show the way Lessing's protagonists develop their understanding of the meaning of division and of the voyage in. I will examine in the three following chapters the ways Anna Wulf, in *The Golden Notebook*, Martha Quest and Lynda Coldridge, in *The Four-Gated City*, and Charles Watkins, in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, earn the knowledge of their limits and possibilities as human beings and as participants in a cosmic harmony. The work on their divided selves and the voyage in bring to each one of the characters a new facet of understanding; consequently, a different organization of experience is presented through the novels. This development of their understanding will culminate in Charles Watkins' ascension to the Crystal in the last novel, *Briefing*.

The presence of squares and circles in the three novels is extremely important since Lessing develops with them the necessities of re-generating the idea of what being human means and re-shaping the structure of relationships. Squares and circles help to illustrate the way experiences during and after the voyage in are organized. As a consequence, they stimulate our thoughts about the importance of leaving our minds open not only to other human beings and to the universe but also to ourselves.

Notes

- ¹Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook (London: Grafton Books, 1986). All further references to this work appear in the text.
- ²Doris Lessing, The Four-Gated City (London: Grafton Books, 1986). All further references to this work appear in the text.
- ³Doris Lessing, Briefing for a Descent into Hell (London: Grafton Books, 1986). All further references to this work appear in the text.
- ⁴Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p.7.
- ⁵Showalter, p.223.
- ⁶Ronald D. Laing, The Divided Self (New York: Random House, 1969). All further references to this work appear in the text.
- ⁷Ronald D. Laing, The Politics of Experience (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968). All further references to this work appear in the text.
- ⁸Ronald D. Laing, Sobre Loucos e Sãos (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1982), p.107.
- ⁹Showalter, p.228.
- ¹⁰Annis Pratt and L.S. Dembo, Doris Lessing: Critical Studies (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), pp.7-8.
- ¹¹Barbara Hill Rigney, Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980). All further references to this work appear in the text.
- ¹²Marion Vlastos, "Doris Lessing and R.D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy", PMLA, No. 2 (March, 1976). All further references to this work appear in the text.
- ¹³Jean Pickering, "Marxism and Madness: The Two Faces of Doris Lessing's Myth", Modern Fiction Studies, 26, No. 1 (Spring 1980). All further references to this work appear in the text.

CHAPTER 2

THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK

black
dark, it is so dark
it is dark
there is a kind of darkness here
Lessing, The Golden Notebook

The first words of the black notebook quoted in the epigraph above illustrate the difficulties that Anna, a writer, faces while searching for a way to write. The expression through the written word has been false, obliterating, and has neglected the truth of facts. Anna opposes darkness to light which is her hope, the force that prevents her from running, from calling someone, from despairing. The change from darkness to light corresponds to the movement of The Golden Notebook - the change from dark/chaos and formlessness to light/inner golden notebook and Free Women is Anna Wulf's and Saul Green's movement towards a better understanding of themselves and of their world. Anna looks for answers also in the company of a therapist, Mrs. Marks, or Mother Sugar in Anna's words. She stimulates creativity, the work on dreams, and mainly the openness to feel again. As a consequence, Anna starts facing the awareness of fragmentation and dissolution inside and outside herself without neglecting the possibilities of survival, of learning and of developing inside the whirlpool.

Like Laing's *The Divided Self*, published in 1961. The *Golden Notebook* presents in 1962 a painful reality of separateness, egotism and violence among human beings. Lessing's novel gives emphasis to the divided self and to the sufferings and struggles of people seen as "schizophrenic". She points out the difficulties a human being has in dealing with personalities that invade her own and that threaten the integrity of what is seen by Lessing as "the core" - the most precious element that characterizes the integrity that a human being has with the self and with the world. The sixties start, then, with publications that show the necessities of revising concepts like sanity and madness - concepts that are discussed and developed during the decade.

Anna Wulf experiences life in many ways. She has an active participation in the Communist Party, is constantly busy with her daughter, has been dedicated to her lover for five years and has tried to be a free woman. Her financial security is guaranteed by the profits of the novel *Frontiers of War*, a best-seller. But Anna has a way of looking at life that is curious. Wulf has divided experience into four notebooks, each having a different colour and concerning a specific area of her life.

The black notebook is related to the part inside Anna which deals with writing - the business involved as well as the sources of her creativity in *Frontiers*. She subdivides the notebook into two sections, *Source* and *Money*, but only the first section is relevant to this analysis. The *Source* elucidates Anna's relationship with a group of communist friends, and how their stay at a hotel in Africa brings about the ideas for the plot of

her novel. Cynicism, nostalgia and idealism are present in this description of their lives and reflect Anna's and the group's preoccupation with the colour bar, communism, human relationships and the intuition of a correspondence between nature and human behavior. This correspondence becomes evident in their experience of life in Africa and disturbs Anna's rereading of *Frontiers*. For critic Mary Ann Singleton, who has studied the African veld in Lessing's fiction, the veld stands for "the unconscious, physical world of nature that nourishes mankind with its unity but also inflicts its own mindless repetition and, in human terms, cruelty and indifferences"⁴. Anna's incapacities for writing a novel, a report after *Frontiers* and the reason for starting psychoanalysis, have at roots an incapacity to avoid nihilism and a sterile cynicism towards life. As Anna realizes in *The Golden Notebook*, the novel she has written elicits several feelings that shame her and block creativity:

The novel is 'about' a colour bar problem. I said nothing in it that wasn't true. But the emotion it came out of was something frightening, the unhealthy, feverish, illicit excitement of wartime, a lying nostalgia, a longing for licence, for freedom, for the jungle, for formlessness. It is so clear to me that I can't read that novel now without feeling ashamed, as if I were in a street naked. (p.82)

The red notebook, on its turn, presents the reality of divisions inside the British Communist Party. Anna has participated intensively not only as a member but also as a secretary. But many things intensify the splits in the structure of the C.P. as well as among its members. Incoherences, the

discovery of crimes, the repetition of mistakes in younger generations contribute to Anna's disillusion with the Party and the consequent leave.

The yellow notebook presents Anna's and Michael's relationship in a fictional form - the novel *The Shadow of the Third*. The protagonists, Ella and Paul, stand for Anna and Michael. Ella is a writer who, like Anna, is involved with deep feelings, vital questions for her life. In Ella's case, death and suicide are important themes. While *Frontiers* deals with the colour bar and with "the secret ugly frightening pulse of war itself" (p.162), *Shadow* reveals a writer worried with surfaces and undercurrents. The protagonist in Ella's novel, who is a man, has an organized life on the surface whereas the undercurrent is one of despair. "The growth of the unknown intention to commit suicide" (p.181) is linked to impossible fantasies of a future and beautiful life. Ella suggests that the apparent order in the surface of this man's life is not sanity but an intimation of madness. In this way, the yellow notebook reveals not only the Anna who writes fiction about herself but also the writer who realizes division inside the human being - a division which requires the re-definition of the concepts of order, sanity and madness.

The blue notebook is a diary that shows the reality in the world around Anna and the way she reacts toward it. She recognizes that many people do not want to feel, but instead limit their emotion and live based on pain-giving. She writes about daily events but sometimes this proves inefficient. Her language is not good enough to show reality, and she finds an

element of untruthfulness in her words which is linked to sterility in life. In lots of places the diary is taken over by newspaper cuttings. But to writing corresponds an element of organization. The four notebooks are, at least, a defence against total fragility and formlessness as we see in this image:

She used an old-fashioned music stool for this occupation, and she now spun it high, almost as high as the table itself, and sat looking down at the four notebooks as if she were a general on the top of a mountain, watching her armies deploy in the valley below. (p.72)

But Anna is questioned because of her determination to live in compartments, to defend herself with the barrier of notebooks. In the novel *Free Women*, written after the notebooks and presented in five sections which subdivide the presentation of each of the four coloured notebooks, Anna Wulf is not only the writer but also the name of the protagonist. In *Free Women*, Anna Wulf is questioned by Tommy, son of her friend Molly, who confronts her with the tendency to compartmentalize:

And you aren't even honest enough to let yourself be what you are - everything's divided off and split up. ...You take care to divide yourself up into compartments. If things are a chaos, then that's what they are. I don't think there's a pattern anywhere. You are just making patterns out of cowardice. (p.273)

Tommy is mentioned by Anna in the notebooks but in *Free Women* the writer leads him to a difficult self-question - he tries to commit suicide after this dialogue with Anna. Anna's cowardice is too painful to him and he can't understand the

reasons for not facing chaos.

Along with Anna's exterior fragmentation in four different notebooks, she is involved with divisions inside herself. They express themselves in different forms: nightmares, dreams, visions and shadows. In many of these dreams there is a disruption of what she is - the "core" of herself - and a slow emergence of alien personalities. But the importance of the manifestation of divisions in dreams, nightmares, etc. lies on the capacity for stimulating Anna's confrontation with chaos and formlessness. She knows that "the precious self" - Laing's real self - has to be preserved and that the alien personalities can not annihilate the experience inside chaos. Anna's world of dreams can not be separated from the writing of notebooks as well. Both dreams and notebooks are manifestations of the attempt to face pain, violence and to overcome the annihilation of experience. The detailed study of dreams, nightmares and shadows that follows has the intention of showing the difficulties that Anna has in integrating her different experiences in life and the necessities, at this point, of facing the violence that surrounds her and the conflicts involved in this process. She has to learn that conflict and limitation of feeling are, necessarily, steps in the direction of the understanding of what an individual is.

"An enormous web of beautiful fabric stretched out" (p.297). The scene of Anna's dream in the red notebook emphasizes the map. Anna keeps distance from the embroidered pictures and myths of mankind whose most impressive colour is red. Red is the Soviet Union. Black is Africa. But, suddenly, the colours start melting and flowing into each other and while this process takes place

"the world becomes whole. all one beautiful glittering colour" (p.298). But the pulses become so intense that an explosion occurs. An explosion of happiness. Nothing else exists and the world is a chaos. Then Anna hears a small voice: "Somebody pulled a thread of the fabric and it all dissolved" (p.298). Her reaction towards the dream is important: "I woke up, joyful and elated" (p.298). This dream, by being presented in the red notebook, reflects Anna's political awareness of the divisions of countries. It is only when the colours start melting that Anna feels happiness. As the colours turn into "a colour I have never seen in my life" (p.298), the happiness of unification becomes immense. The explosion and, consequently, chaos are not a reason for sorrow. On the contrary, chaos means joy, satisfaction. The divisions have ended and the fabric has dissolved.

Anna's second dream occurs in the yellow notebook. Anna's voice is Ella's. The scenery, however, is much more painful than in the first dream. Before sleeping, Ella has been in Paul's house and realizes not only the characteristics of the trap this house has been but also the probable characteristic of fragmentation that the community presents: "and she looked down the street and thought that probably they were all like this, all in fragments, not one of them a whole, reflecting a whole life, a whole human being" (p.226). In her dream, then, Ella tries to prevent the house from disintegrating. She tries to organize the rooms according to her style but after doing it the room returns to its former aspect. A recurrent image in the novel, the walls dissolving, appears in this dream for the first time. The reason for this fragmentation is conflict, the absence of order and

obedience to a central command: "only by an effort of will could she prevent the house disintegrating, and flying off in all directions because of the conflict between the rooms" (p.229). Anna-Ella knows that her strength is too small and that the conflict is not, for a while, a reason for happiness.

Suffering and happiness come side by side in Anna's dream with a casket. She writes about it in the first blue notebook. The scene is an art gallery, full of dead pictures and statues. Anna is the protagonist and carries a casket which will be delivered to a group of people. But they do not open the box. They start giving her large sums of money and Anna cries. In order to force them to look, Anna opens up the casket and, to her surprise, it is full of fragments and pieces of flesh from all over the world. It is a composite of suffering represented through bits and pieces. But the businessmen do not notice the fragmentation. Anna shuts the box with sorrow and when they decide to open it they are delighted: "It was a small green crocodile with a winking sardonic snout. I thought it was the image of a crocodile, made of jade, or emeralds, when I saw it was alive, for large frozen tears rolled down its cheeks and turned into diamonds" (p.253). What Anna feels, then, is superiority: "I laughed out aloud when I saw how I had cheated the businessmen and I woke up" (p.253). This cheating of the businessmen is central in the attempt to interpret the dream. Anna is surprised by the vision of the fragments and by the vision of the crocodile. The place where the delivery of the casket happens is also significant. When compared to Mother Sugar's consulting room, "a shrine to art", this art gallery

gives the same impression of perfection, of the sacred, of the untouched. So, the commerce of Anna's self is not accomplished because of the businessmen's (psychotherapists'?) blindness. Only Anna can see in her image in a shop window the pleasure of knowing more: "a small, rather pale, dry, spiky woman, and there was a wry look on my face which I recognized as the grin on the snout of that malicious little green crocodile in the crystal casket of my dream" (p.254). Anna's fragments and her "crocodile" are parts of her self. However, the place where they should be delivered and the people who should understand them are not appropriate. The "shrine to art" is too complete and too dead. The crocodile, on the other hand, is still incomplete. It lacks the fragments to be whole. But Anna, at this time, can't understand that both visions are parts of herself. The reality of violence and destruction as well as the preciousness of the diamonds have to be matched in Anna's experience of the self and of the world. Although they are in the same casket, she is still unable to see them together.

Anna's nights are populated by nightmares as well. Along with dreams involving conflict, pain and joy, certain principles of terror invade her intimacy. Anna tells Mother Sugar that the "nightmare about destruction" is the name for "the most frightening of all the different types of cycles of dreams" (p.463). After dreaming about it twice, Anna names it "the nightmare about the principle of spite, or malice - joy in spite" (p.463). In one of the dreams, the principle takes the form of a wooden vase from Russia. The vase has a personality which is destructive and anarchic. The other time the principle takes

shape in an old man. He is dwarf-like and Anna is even more terrified because he is human: "This old man smiled and giggled and sniggered, was ugly, vital and powerful, and again, what he represented was pure spite, malice, joy in malice, joy in a destructive impulse" (pp.463-4). Anna is afraid when the principle involves her "walls", her "rooms". In this case, besides facing conflict, Anna has to "hold the fort", the house that is herself. "And I dreamed the dream again, always when particularly tired, of my self or under stress, or in conflict, when I could feel that the walls of my self were thin or in danger" (p.464). The most terrifying experience happens when the principle of destruction does not have anything to hold itself to. When Anna realizes it is in a friend of hers, the horror becomes more intense: "I was frightened because if the element is now outside of myth, and inside another human being, then it can only mean it is loose in me also, or can too easily be evoked" (p.465).

Another world in Anna's life portrays the similarities between the story of her life and the fiction she writes in order to better understand it: the world of shadows. Shadows are a continuation, parts of what we are. For Anna, shadows are not only reflections of her self but also sources for the understanding of what she is. She has to submerge in this world and there find the reason for the building up of her self. The world of shadows expresses itself basically in Anna's fictional story with Ella/Anna - Paul/Michel. Anna gives this story a name: The Shadow of the Third. Ella has an affair with Paul, a married man. She is also a writer occupied with the theme of suicide and

with the growth of it until the death of the protagonist. The building up of death in Ella's story has its correspondence with the changing of the shadow in Ella's life. At first, the shadow is Paul's wife, the third. Then, it changes into Ella's fantasies about Paul's wife, a kind of Ella's alter ego. Finally, the shadow becomes herself. The process is like that: Ella forms the image of Paul's wife as "a serene, calm, unjealous, unenvious, undemanding woman, full of resources of happiness inside herself" (p.212). She knows, however, that Paul's description does not match this picture. Slowly Ella begins to understand that "this is what she would like to be herself, this imagined woman is her own shadow, everything she is not" (p.212). But why is Ella's image so different from Paul's wife and from her own? One of the answers could be her dependence on him. Ella's life, at this point, corresponds to a shadow: "Every fibre in herself is woven with him, and she cannot imagine living without him... And she is clinging, so she comes to realize, to this image of the other woman, the third, as a sort of safety protection for herself" (p.213). In this world of shadows, Ella understands Paul's jealousy through his shadow which is a self-hating rake, free, casual, heartless" (p.213). The realization of the existence of these shadows is part of a conscious mind. The perception of Paul's shadow, by Ella, illustrates the realization: "So what it means is, that in coming together with Ella, in a serious relationship, the rake in himself has been banished, pushed aside, and now stands in the wings of his personality, temporarily unused, waiting to return" (p.213). Paul's shadow, then, has a negative aspect. When Ella analyzes her own she knows

it is positive due to the aspects of calmness, unjealousy and serenity. However, her self is negative. Paul's, on the other hand, is positive. So, the world of shadows is complex due to a polarity which, according to Ella, is always present. Again we come to Lessing's and Laing's idea that it is necessary to face the two sides of the polarity real/good - false/evil in order to accomplish a better integration and understanding of the human self.

This aspect of shadows gets more interesting when the study of Ella's fiction starts. The analysis of Ella's difficulties in writing is exemplified in the image of a "dry well". She looks into herself but she gets only dry sentences. The need for water, for the images shaping themselves is vital for Ella's development of writing. So, I see the search for outlines and images as another side of Ella's need for clarity, for light: "Ella, alone in her room, looks into her private pool, waiting for the shadows to form, for the story to shape itself" (p.452). She knows that there is a book waiting, inside her, to be written. It is clear to her that there is a possibility for change in the writing of this story:

I've got to accept the patterns of self-knowledge which mean unhappiness or at least a dryness. But I can twist it into victory. A man and a woman - yes. Both at the end of their tether. Both cracking up because of a deliberate attempt to transcend their own limits. And out of chaos, a new kind of strength. (p.454)

Besides focusing on Ella's/Anna's difficulties to write, the image of the dry well, of "a cracked opening into the earth that

was all dust" (p.398) illustrates the divisions Anna is enduring. The process of dissolving, of becoming a different substance from her own, shows Anna's fragile state. The jar and cracking up are parts of a process that intensifies as the voyage into madness approaches: a further understanding of the self, of the forces, good and bad, that compose the universe. Especially in the second yellow notebook, Anna shows the split Ella is experiencing. Before sex with Cy Maitland, Ella understands the experience she will have with him: "He was standing across the room from her; and she saw him as all flesh, a body of warm, abundant, exuberant flesh. Very well then, that's what it would be. (At this point, Ella detached herself from Ella, and stood to one side, watching and marvelling.)" (p.320). During sex Ella continues apart: "(Ella was standing to one side, thinking ironically: Well, well!)" (p.320). The parentheses help to give this sense of distance even inside the text and continue after sex: "(At this point Ella became herself, one person, both of them thinking as one.)" (p.320). Ella also has an experience of disruption when the shadow of the third becomes herself: "As Ella cracks and disintegrates, she holds fast to the idea of Ella whole, healthy and happy" (p.437). She tries to maintain the "good, wise and serene woman" inside her so that "the fortress" can be held. Anna is able to perceive Ella as a detached and separate person: "I see Ella, walking slowly about a big empty room, thinking, waiting. I Anna, see Ella. Who is, of course, Anna. But that is the point, for she is not" (p.447). At the moment of writing about Ella, Anna detaches herself. Or: both become separated: "Ella floats away from me and becomes someone

else" (p.447). In this process of floating away and dissolving, Anna becomes afraid. When she says "I remain Anna because of a certain kind of intelligence" (p.463), she proves that the only thing that prevents her total annihilation is this mechanism: "I stay above all this chaos, because of this increasingly cold, critical, balancing little brain of mine" (p.398). In a similar way to Laing's real self, Anna holds to what is precious and central in her life.

How does psychotherapy help in this process of dissolving, of losing faith in the act of writing? Is Mother Sugar's treatment a helpful solution for a better understanding of the fragmented individual and fragmented world? Mother Sugar, by representing the institutionalized truth of mental health, is the weighing balance, the coordinator of facts that can "save" Anna. The treatment is characterized by unanswered questions, ironical smiles, silences, encouraging noddings. Before the voyage into madness with Saul, Anna and Mother Sugar establish a relationship that tries to prevent Anna's disintegration.

At this moment, it is important to consider Laing's ideas about the theme of fragmentation. The individual, by being helped, in a true interexperimental relationship with a therapist, can try the unification of the broken pieces so that a new order is established. Considering Laing's ideas it is evident that Lessing presents a similar view in *The Golden Notebook*. Anna defines the word neurotic in a way which is similar to Laing's: "I'm going to make the obvious point that perhaps the word neurotic means the condition of being highly conscious and developed. The essence of neurosis is conflict. But the essence

of living now, fully, not blocking off to what goes on, is conflict" (p.456). So, for both Laing and Lessing, something precious belongs to the discussion of the real meaning of being in conflict and of being split. Anna continues exploring the relevance of not limiting by realising that: "In fact I've reached the stage where I look at people and say - he or she, they are whole at all because they've chosen to block off at this stage or that. People stay sane by blocking off, by limiting themselves" (p.456). Lessing, through Anna's psychological treatment, proposes a re-definition of the real meaning of sanity. Anna is the example of this normal person when she limits herself in her notebooks. With them she is trying to remain sane.

Mother Sugar's consulting room is the place where opposed forces confront themselves. Anna is conscious of two different "substances" there. "I look at the room we are sitting in. It is tall, long, dark, quietened. It has flowers everywhere. The walls are covered with reproductions of masterpieces and there are statues. It is almost like an art gallery. It is a dedicated room" (p.239). Yet Anna is basically different from this pleasurable place: "nothing in my life corresponds with anything in this room - my life has always been crude, unfinished, raw, tentative" (pp.239). It is also in Mother Sugar's room that a discussion of what Anna should be like takes place. The therapist usually relates Anna's dreams with myths and is bored when Anna tries to interpret them in her own way. But it is exactly this naming of Anna's dreams that diminishes her suffering. Dreams and myths are safer than reality:

But when I try to use an experience, the wolves come down out of the forest, or when the castle gates open... When I'm flying like Icarus - during these dreams, no matter what frightening material they incorporate, I could cry with happiness. And I know why - it's because all pain, and the killing and the violence is safely held in the story and it can't hurt me. (p.457)

What Anna needs is the freedom to be Anna Freeman, her family name, and leave the Wulf behind; in Mother Sugar's sacred room: "The next stage is, surely, that I leave the safety of myth and Anna Wulf walks forward alone" (p.457). Later on she reaffirms: "I'm tired of the wolves and the castles and the forests and the priests. I can cope with them in any form they choose to present themselves. But I've told you, I want to walk off, by myself, Anna Freeman" (p.458). So, it is not surprising that Anna values the new, the non-cyclic as basic for her life and opens up her whole existence for this dimension: "sometimes I meet people, and it seems to me the fact they are cracked across, they're split, means they are keeping themselves open for something" (p.460). Here we see that the dry well has its value.

While analysing dreams with Anna, Mother Sugar tries to capture the meaning of the frightening and horrifying aspects of the principles of joy-in-spite. This is another side of Anna's experience with therapy - Mother Sugar wants to explore emotions and feelings truly. Anna questions: "If this figure is an elemental and creative force, for good as well as evil, then why should I fear it so terribly?" (p.464). Mother Sugar answers with the wisdom required by Anna's situation: "Perhaps as you dream deeper you'll feel the vitality as good as well as bad" (p.464). This proves to be true. Anna's awareness is much more

developed after the confrontation with her divided self:

It is possible that in order to keep love, feeling, tenderness alive, it will be necessary to feel these emotions ambiguously, even for what is false and debased, or for what is still an idea, a shadow in the willed imagination only... or if what we feel is pain, then we must feel it, acknowledging that the alternative is death. Better anything than the shrewd, the calculated, the non-committal, the refusal of giving for fear of the consequences... (p.529)

The voyage into the self is, therefore, a necessary step for the comprehension of the fragmentary nature of self and life. The fact that the characters do not avoid the voyage means that pain, division, chaos, and consequently, the search are vital for their mature and total vision of the world. Only with the exploration of terror and beauty can a creative force be born.

Doris Lessing uses the flat with its aspect of enclosure, of shell, as the perfect setting for the experience of unification. Several critics have studied the aspect of quaternality, reflected in the spatial configuration of the four walls, in some of Lessing's works and the conclusions vary. Frederick R. Karl in his article "Doris Lessing in the Sixties: The New Anatomy of Melancholy" negates Mircea Eliade's idea of space as being sacred and directs his ideas to a vision of the room "whose air is foul; space is not infinite, but geometric, and it signifies the final vestiges of the profane city"². Karl also emphasizes the negative aspects of the "fours" in Lessing's work: "The 'fours' indicate all directions, negate completion, baffle expansion, intensify the enclosed quest. There is no magic in four" (p.29). With this last opinion it is impossible to agree. The fact that the

exploration of chaos takes place in a space limited by four walls does not diminish the value of the experience. As a matter of fact, Jung's comment on quaternality as presented in the Dictionary of Symbols is relevant to this discussion: "Jung touches upon this question, commenting that the square, as the minimal composite number (symbolizing a situation), represents the pluralist or inner state of the man who is not yet at one with himself"³. In the same way, Jean Pickering in her article "Marxism and Madness: The Two Faces of Lessing's Myth" points out the importance of the house and quaternality: "Lessing frequently represents the interior life by the house, which, as Jung implies, is another version of the city: they are related by quaternality which, like the circle, is an archetype of the wholeness of the self" (p.25).

The atmosphere of the flat is characterized by its aspect of darkness: "It is so dark in this flat, so dark, it is as if darkness were the shape of cold" (p.589). These are Anna's words which, with Saul's, help to characterize the sense of hugeness, as well: "'This is an extraordinary room', he said, 'it's like a world'" (p.589). The need of darkness and the aspect of vastness become clearer when Anna tries to introduce light in the environment:

But when I turned on the light in my big room, I knew this was wrong, light was foreign to it, so I let the dark come back, controlled by the two paraffin heaters and the glow from the gas fire. I lay down, and thought of the little earth, half of it in cold dark, swinging in immense spaces of darkness (p.589).

Anna needs darkness like the planet that is obliged to follow its natural course. She knows that her steps include an experience not only with the vastness of the planet but also with the obscure side of it.

The shape of the flat is also interesting. It is sometimes a lost object in a dark and long night: "The flat is like a ship floating on a dark sea, it seems to float, isolated from life, self-contained" (p.563). The flat can also be very small but vibrant with the energy of a new life: "We're both mad. We're inside a cocoon of madness" (p.562). The flat can transform itself once more: "Sometimes the flat is an oasis of loving affection, then suddenly it's a battleground, even the walls vibrate with hate, we circle around each other like two animals" (p.557). Walls and floor transform themselves according to the change of atmosphere and the perception of new struggles and discoveries: "The floor between me and the bed was bulging and heaving. The walls seemed to bulge inwards, then float out and away into space. For a moment I stood in space, the walls gone, as if I stood above ruined buildings, I knew I had to get to bed... (p.578). Here we observe that walls and floors seem to be like Saul's and Anna's substances. They modify according to their experience.

The presence of two human beings, Anna Wulf and Saul Green, is vital for the successful voyage into madness and out of it. Their experiences are possible because of the openness for each other, for the freedom of being invaded by each other. This interexperiential relationship, characterized by Laing as the only way for a successful voyage, is what Wulf and Green achieve.

Lessing works with the voyage into the self in three "fragments" of The Golden Notebook. It appears in the yellow and in the blue notebook and becomes stronger in the golden one. Lessing portrays different aspects of the voyage by such a division and also stresses, in each of them, the importance of the total fusion of two human beings.

The fourth yellow notebook is characterized by a different structure when compared to the other yellow ones. It is divided into short stories and short novels. Each one has a number and an asterisk on its left side. It is curious that the stories and novels are always about a couple and that Anna has nineteen versions for their story. The following quotations are examples of what will be Anna's and Saul's experience. In "* 4 A SHORT STORY" we find: "A healthy woman, in love with a man. She finds herself becoming ill, with symptoms she has never had in her life. She slowly understands that this illness is not hers, she understands the man is ill" (p.517). In "* 10" there is "A man whose 'sense of reality' has gone; and because of it, has a deeper sense of reality than 'normal' people" (p.520). And to conclude, another side of Anna's and Saul's relationship in "* 18 A SHORT STORY": "She changes in response to one man who is a psychological chameleon, so that in the course of a day she can be half a dozen different personalities, either in opposition to, or in harmony with him" (p.523). Anna will reproduce the asterisks in the blue notebook since yellow and blue were written simultaneously. This referring back to the asterisks of the yellow notebook in the blue notebook has a meaning which is explained in the golden notebook: "The fact is, the real

experience can't be described. I think, bitterly, that a row of asterisks, like an old-fashioned novel, might be better. Or a symbol of some kind, a circle perhaps, or a square. Anything at all, but not words" (p.609). The experience is too dense while the language is too thin.

The jarrings, crackings and discordances among human beings are the most painful experiences that Anna opens up for the reader in the fourth blue notebook. The note of split is intensified at moments when Anna dreams about the principle of joy-in-destruction and at moments of entering people and being entered by them. The most painful moments happen when integration with another human being fails and when the terror of disintegration becomes the most fearful feeling. Anna is conscious of the danger her confrontation with disorganized forces imply but she does not give up: "Something has to be played out, some pattern has to be worked through..." (p.563). In this process of discovery, Anna still has to fight inner divisions, as in the preparation for the voyage. However, Anna is able to leave her body and experience other people's minds. She is also conscious of the terror of war and lives it fully. So, the living of all this pain and conflict will be part of the next steps of the voyage further in.

Divisions provoke frightening feelings in both Anna's and Saul's lives. When Saul comes to live in her flat, she becomes the hostess of a strange creature who comes to inhabit her, naturally. The new creature is born in Anna at the moment she starts making love with Saul: "of emotional and sexual responses, that grows in its own laws, its own logic" (p.543). But the

creature has reactions according to how she is treated: "For a week he didn't come near me. For a week I watched the female creature shrink, then grow angry, grow jealous" (p.545). The different creatures inside Anna transform themselves continually. When sex is cold, for instance, the Anna who loves shudders whereas the other "who had been capable of enjoying, with the antagonist, combative sex, was limp, not fighting" (p.565). The "Shadow of the Third", from the yellow notebook, is once more repeated. This time it is Saul who requires "this wise, kind, all-mother figure, who is also sexual playmate and sister" (p.567). Anna longs to be this mythical woman. After thinking about her, Anna can see who she, Anna, is and the place she belongs to: "a tiny unimportant figure in the ugly old flat in an ugly decaying house, with the wastes of dark London around her... I was desperately ashamed, being locked in Anna's, an unimportant little animal's terrors" (p.567). Besides being the snubbed woman in love and the "curious detached sardonic Anna", she is also the "obedient child" (p.544). The obedient child, however, comes in response to Saul's divided selves: first, she has to face the abrupt man who defends his freedom, then, the man who pleads and, finally, the man who is brotherly and affectionate.

Saul reacts in singular ways to the experience of fragmentation. One of his most important moments of self-awareness happens when Anna suggests a witch-doctor. He refuses to be dictated with an incredible amount of repeated "I"s: "'I am I, Saul Green, I am what I am what I am. I...'" (p.565). Anna compares his "I"s to shots of gunfire. They represent Saul's desire of integration while his scattered bits

just fly. He is like the bullets he shouts, the I tries to be self-contained but it loses itself. Saul is so multiple that Anna wonders, sometimes, about the person who will return from the streets. She knows, however, that at some moments the real man is in front of her, the man who thinks and judges. Suffering is present when Anna feels he is becoming "something" else: "...his whole frame quivered as he went into a different gear, how else can I put it?" (p.571).

Unity, in Anna's flat, can only be found either in the spatial configuration of the four walls or in the limiting position of the four notebooks. But as we have seen, these barriers are fragile when we think about the experiences inside the flat and their relation with the world outside.

Anna's integration with the world occurs when she assumes the terror present in the world. Being fragmented she heightens her apprehension of everything that happens around her and thus becomes more sensitized and raw. In her attempt to find the full consciousness of the vastness of the world without losing the consciousness of the small particles which are part of it, she finds the terrifying fear of war: "I was invaded by terror, the terror of nightmares, I was experiencing the fear of war as one does in nightmares, not the intellectual balancing of probabilities, possibilities, but knowing, with my nerves and imagination the fear of war" (p.568). Anna knows the force of war and the knowledge of it becomes inextricable from her view of the world. She is linked to the terrific force: "And I knew that the cruelty and the spite and the I, I, I, I, of Saul and of Anna were part of the logic of war; and I knew how strong these

emotions were, in a way that would never leave me, would become part of how I saw the world" (p.568). This power of destruction is always present in the daily newspapers. So, the natural reaction is to feel the experience of the printed lines inside her. The news and Anna's "creatures" start a mutual integration of terrifying and destructive forces.

What begins in Anna's life is a series of experiences with invasions. With Saul she understands that her state of anxiety is due to his illness. The movements he makes in his room, above hers, enter her world and start a communication of feelings and emotions never before experienced: "When he leaves the flat 'to go for a little walk' my nerves seem to stretch out and follow him, as if tied to him" (p.556). Besides this communication, Anna knows the joyful experience with destruction in a dream: She says: "I was the malicious male-female dwarf figure, the principle of joy-in-destruction; and Saul was my counterpart, male-female, my brother and my sister, and we were dancing in some open place, under enormous white buildings, which were filled with hideous, menacing, black machinery which held destruction" (p.573). The atmosphere is nostalgic and they long for death. In their characterization of incompleteness lies the fear, the destruction, the knowledge of truth. Their kiss is "the caress of two half-human creatures celebrating destruction" (p.574). In a nightmare Charlie Themba, an African, melts into her. She also has visions of an Algerian soldier stretched on a torture bed, of a communist in a communist jail and of a soldier in Cuba. But the most relevant experience for Anna is when her self enters an Algerian soldier and, afterwards, a Chinese

peasant. Mixed with a flying and joyful dream, the dream of invading other people's bodies has an aspect of terror: dissolution. The dream, however, is worthwhile in the sense that Anna leaves her individuality and fuses herself with other personalities: "It was with a weary sense of duty I became Anna, like putting on a soiled dress" (p.580). This soiled dress is like the weight of being stuck to one place, the weight of being only one without the sharing of experiences and of emotions. When Anna assumes her writer's block to Saul she is reaffirming her need to share the exact emotions she has been experiencing for such a long time. The hiding of the four notebooks is an act of cowardice of the person who puts on continuously a soiled dress. When she buys the golden notebook she decides to open up a possibility for herself as a new writer, as a person involved with the world and with the communication of all feelings: "I'll start a new notebook, all of myself in one book" (p.585).

The inner golden notebook is the expression of a necessity for both Saul and Anna - the necessity of building up out of untruth and falsity. Some aspects of the voyage portrayed in the blue notebook continue being emphasized in the golden notebook. Anna still points to the fusion of her and of Saul's selves into one in what concerns his illness. The I's that Saul shouts like bullets are also present. But the distinctive aspect is the projection of films in Anna's mind and the presence of an invisible projectionist. This invisible creature is responsible for a new order in Anna's life and shows, consequently, a different way to face writing.

The projectionist helps Anna to look carefully at scenes of

her life and discover the untruthfulness in many of them. It admonishes her and makes her conscious of the necessities of not blocking understanding, of grasping meanings. A new process of naming is involved in the retrospective vision imposed by the projectionist. He calls her attention to the correct emphasis she has put in her stories: "I was faced with the burden of recreating order out of the chaos that my life had become. Time had gone, and my memory did not exist, and I was unable to distinguish between what I had invented and what I had known" (p.597). When Saul awakens her, she becomes conscious that Saul is responsible for this experience. As a consequence, Anna decides to break the relationship due to the strength on his side. She asks him, "'Can't you see this is a cycle, we go around and around?'" (p.598). The cycle in their situation corresponds to repetition and we know that Anna is looking for a new pattern, for a new shaping. The next time the projectionist appears, the film of Anna's life has the characteristic of a universal feeling and understanding:

...there was a fusion, and instead of seeing separate scenes, people, faces, movements, glances, they were all together, the film became immensely slow again, it became a series of moments where a peasant's hand bent to drop seed into earth, or a man stood on a dry hill side in the moonlight, stood eternally, his rifle ready on his arm. Or a woman lay awake in darkness saying, No, I won't kill myself, I won't, I won't. (p.611)

After these important moments together, Saul advises Anna to start writing again, to face division and suffering in order to be truthful. Saul gives her the first sentence of the book she is

going to write: "There are the two women you are, Anna. Write down: The two women were alone in the London flat'" (p.615). Anna, then, writes the first sentence of his book: "'On a dry hillside in Algeria, the soldier watched the moonlight glinting on his rifle'" (p.615). We can infer by the position of both sentences that their meaning is a starting point, after the voyage in, in Anna's and Saul's lives. Saul admits that Anna is still divided into two and suggests to start focusing on both women. Anna knows that Saul is in a process of understanding and makes a parallel between the scene by the projectionist, quoted above, and his reality. These two sentences make clear that Saul will continue his everlasting search for understanding whereas Anna will have to balance Wulf and Freeman.

Before they separate, Saul expresses the unity he still feels towards Anna and the lasting force of their friendship: "There are a few of us around in the world, we rely on each other even though we don't know each other's names. But we rely on each other all the time. We're a team, we're the ones who haven't given in, who'll go on fighting" (p.617). The voyage into the self, then, shows the world of conflicts but also the world of companionship, of the invisible forces of unity and harmony that link people. If Saul and Anna are not always exclusively malicious and spiteful human beings it is due to other joyful and constructive capacities. The divisions and the power of destruction are unavoidable experiences for them. Only through the jarrings, crackings and discordant feelings can they leave each other for greater "interexperiences" with the world. With no openness it is impossible to be your own and integrated self.

The result of so many experiences is *The Golden Notebook*. Anna displays her armies, the four notebooks, among the sections of *Free Women* which, according to Lessing, are the frame or skeleton of the whole novel. So, while each notebook has four sections, with the exception of the unique golden notebook, *Free Women* has five divisions. The last one presents Anna's plans after the voyage into the self. She is going to join the Labour Party, teach in a school for delinquent kids and work in a marriage welfare centre. She has no plans for writing. At this point, we can infer that the Anna who writes the notebooks is not exactly the same Anna who is the protagonist in *Free Women*. There is the Anna who decides to write and starts FW with "The two women were alone in the London flat" (p.25) and the Anna protagonist in FW who, after the voyage in, decides to work with social work. So, there is Anna who is liberated/free to write but another Anna, another protagonist, who decides not to.

The sentences that start and close *The Golden Notebook* are relevant to the analysis of Anna's division. The novel starts with "The two women were alone in the London flat" (p.25). Before giving her the sentence, Saul says: "There are the two women you are, Anna. Write down: The two women were alone in the London flat" (p.615). Anna does not use her two selves but her friend Molly and her own person to start the novel. When *Free Women* ends Molly is going to get married and Anna will start working. So, both women will start different ways as Anna, the writer, says in the last sentence of the novel: "The two women kissed and separated" (p.638). These three sentences quoted in this paragraph help to elucidate some points I still have to make in

order to conclude the chapter.

When Saul says in the inner golden notebook "There are the two women you are, Anna" (p.615) he gives emphasis to the division within her. According to Singleton, in *The Golden Notebook* "Lessing's chief aim is to show the essential duality of personality and the need to find a way to balance the opposites within oneself" (p.85). But Saul completes his sentence by saying: "Write down. The two women were alone in the London flat" (p.615). With this sentence Anna opens up *Free Women* but does not expose the duality within herself. She is going to start a conventional novel with its appropriate artistic forms. The context from which it has emerged, however, is rather raw. The significance of the sentences at the end and at the beginning rests in this aspect of crudeness and completeness. In this way, Doris Lessing closes a circle and encompasses two squares within it: four sections of the artistic and finished novel called *Free Women* dividing four sections of the four coloured notebooks as well as the inner golden notebook. There is only the fifth section of *Free Women* that is not included in the circle. In this last part we find the final sentence "The two women kissed and separated" (p.638). At this fifth part, the squares within the circle are put aside and the artistic form becomes meaningful. Anna leaves the mandala, the spatial configuration that leads to interpretation and which opens a way for those who want to experience and transcend, and writes fiction. She has found a balance between the unfinished and the completed, she can put them side by side without neglecting any experience. Anna is able to balance the two women she is: Wulf and Freeman.

Notes

¹Mary Ann Singleton, The City and the Veld: The Fiction of Doris Lessing (London: Associated University Presses, 1977). All further references to this work appear in the text, p.10.

²Frederick R. Karl, "Doris Lessing in the Sixties: The New Anatomy of Melancholy, Contemporary Literature 13 (1972), p.22.

³Juan-Eduardo Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p.292.

CHAPTER 3

THE FOUR-GATED CITY

Over the years the mangroves bridge the water gaps between the islands; they extend the mainland; they create new islands.

Rachel Carson, *Edge of the Sea*.

The Four-Gated City points to a visionary dimension of the world, to a new and revolutionary future, to more sensitive human beings, to the development of more humane organs of perception: to eyes that see and ears that hear. First published in 1969, *The Four-Gated City* is the last of a series of five books which compose the series *Children of Violence*. Martha Quest Hesse is the main character throughout the series but in the last novel she, along with Lynda Coldridge, learns more about the self and understands the forces that govern the world better. In the voyage in, both women explore "the walls of the mind" and face, in a house, the forces of the universe, the horrors of the times. As in *The Golden Notebook*, we find in this novel the ship, the four walls, the shadows, the trapdoor of the submarine. But with a singular difference: a four-gated city emerges as a symbol of harmony and order.

The story of the four-gated city is written by Mark Coldridge, a writer who tries to exemplify through fiction Martha's necessities of being whole. In Mark's inner and outer

Martha's necessities of being whole. In Mark's inner and outer cities, two sides of the human experience show up. The inner city is the sanctuary of joy and harmony whereas the outer city is the place where destructive forces grow. The gardeners that inhabit the inner city know the secret of harmony and cultivate it. The soldiers from the outer city, on the other hand, decide for the conquering of harmony through the destruction of the inner city. The conflict which is established between the dimension of inner and outer spaces exemplifies, then, Martha's struggles to find not only a balance between opposed forces but also the way to preserve what she calls "the best part of me" or, in Laing's words, the true self.

Besides the two cities, Mark's house and the London streets also stand for inner and outer realities. But they bring to the context of the divided self a different perspective. The house reflects Martha's inner necessities of integrating rooms and finding solidity, a real structure. On the street, she has moments of awareness and awakening while walking. The amplitude of space and the variety of meetings allow many discoveries. But the central point, the converging place of inner and outer events is the basement in Mark's house. The door that delimits entrance and exit in this territory shows Martha's and also Lynda's necessities of leaving and entering spaces that can easily either condemn or free their perceptions.

The City maintains, as in *The Golden Notebook*, a discussion and an analysis of the fragmented and polarized world. The differences from the novel published in 1962 concern the way the polarities are introduced. The conflicts, now, involve barriers

imposed by doors and gates which separate house from street, room from room and city from city. The story of the inner and outer cities, on its turn, illustrates Martha's way of seeing personal conflicts: a division between different professions and ways of life - gardeners and soldiers - shows the difficulties of balancing growth and destruction.

A new sensitivity is also introduced by the novel. Characters like Lynda Coldridge are given a special attention because of an aspect that Lessing enhances: supranormal powers have to be understood as indicators of a different order in the universe. My main object of study concerns the change of view from *The Golden Notebook* to *The City* in this point - Lessing still seeks for a balance between contraries but, this time, she gives to the true self a special and dignified place because of the visionary and prophetic powers associated to it.

Laing dedicates attention in *The Politics of Experience*, published in 1967, to some ideas which are present in *The City*. Themes like the necessities of living fully without restraining the experience of the other's world, the importance of keeping a balance between inner and outer, good and bad forces that provoke conflict, and the belief in uncorrupted children and in sound psychotherapeutic relationships constitute important topics in Lessing's *The City* and indicate her tendency, along with Laing, to "celebrate", to enhance the "best" part that remains in the true self.

The understanding of the potentialities of the real self and its relation with the gardener and the inner city are built up progressively in *The City*. Because of this progression, the study

of the novel will be done according to the development of the themes mentioned in the paragraph above in each of the four parts and appendix which structure the novel. The point which differentiates Lessing's *The City* from *The Golden Notebook* and Laing's *The Divided Self* and *The Politics of Experience* can be understood through the study not only of contraries, inner and outer divisions but also of a center, a "nodal point" in the inner city which is responsible for the survival of the planet.

The first part of *The City* demands an act of seeing. It is as if the only and most important thing is to see, to observe, to analyze and afterwards retain and remember the realization just achieved. In this part of the chapter, my main object of concern is the act of seeing that happens on the streets in London. The scenery is one of destroyed objects and crevices everywhere. But destruction allows growth as in the case of an enormous hulk of timber which separates areas in the city: "In the less than two days since she had seen it, a minute yellow flower had emerged from a crevice. That great salty, sour, more-stone-than-wood monument had put out a coronet of green leaves and a flower" (p.86). Another extraordinary experience happens while Martha walks with Iris, her landlady. Iris is the person who knows almost every detail about houses, stories and people in her district in London. And like the Greek goddess of the rainbow, Iris sees in a different way: "With Iris, one moved here, in state of love, if love is the delicate but total acknowledgement of what is" (p.20). In fact, the novel gives the atmosphere, since the beginning, of people who despite destruction still seek for the expansion of what they usually see. So, the novel starts

revealing that a new reality is possible when from destruction growth emerges. On the street, a new perception begins.

Martha's long walks in London reveal a wish to explore deeply what is true about her self. She is trying to build up a reality and an identity out of what already exists. This aspect is exemplified during Martha's excursions through London, in three instances. First, she has an understanding of her identity while examining her surnames and name. During this evaluation a precious revelation comes: "She was (but really became, as if nothing had intervened), Martha Quest, a young girl sitting under the tree from where she could see a great hot landscape and a sky full of birds and clouds" (p.48). A moment of grasping that rarely comes to a human being is achieved and Martha knows that without going back to certain events in her life it will be unnecessary to continue. And the second instance in Martha's walkings comes out of this necessity to go on: "Debts. They had to be paid. A great descent down, down, was before her. Then a wave would lift her up again (when?), to where she was now, on a height, and from where she could glimpse other perspectives" (p.51). The problem with Martha is that the moments of revelation that have to be remembered are usually forgotten. There is a constant alternation between remembrance and forgetfulness in her life. And Martha, by being conscious of it, refuses what is new in favor of a review of her past and of what learning means. This is the third instance:

You suddenly understand something you've understood all your life, but in a new way. But there's a pressure on us all the time to go on to something that seems new because there are new

words attached to it. But I want to take words as ordinary as bread. Or life. Or death. Cliches. I want to have my nose rubbed in cliches. (p.112).

From this point onwards Martha knows that the discovery of her true identity will demand the conscious effort to keep the meaning of these three instances of revelation.

Martha also becomes aware of different spaces and creatures inside herself. First, she is delighted with a dark empty space whose magnificent strength shows capacities she has never imagined:

But who then was she behind the banalities of the day? A young woman? No, nothing but a soft dark receptive intelligence, that was all. And if she tried - but not too hard... She could move back in time, annulling time, for the moment of the effort, and stand in another country... (p.48).

But another presence annoys Martha: "It was as if behind the soft space was a maniac ready to dance inwards with idiotic words and phrases" (p.48). There is also a wave-length whose different rhymes and tunes show that Martha needs to define the ways for living in London. Either in Jack's house, but the wave-length communicates: "Jack fell down and broke his crown, Jack fell down and broke..." (p.50) or in Marjorie's working territory: "Mother, must I go on dancing? Yes, my darling daughter" (p.52). The next movements on the street, therefore, indicate definition. While Jack uses women for prostitution, Marjorie wants her friend Martha to work responsibly and consciously. Martha, then, decides for a house that both claims and attacks her. She will work as a secretary with Mark Coldridge, a writer.

The house in Radley Street becomes the scenery where different forces that imply stability meet. During the first weeks, Martha is like a cat that tries to assimilate each detail and memory from its corners. She realizes the house is solid. At the same time, Martha is afraid of staying too long. There is a strange person who comes to visit them sometimes - Lynda Coldridge, Mark's "schizophrenic" wife, whose presence threatens the solidity of the house. According to Carol Christ in her book *Diving Deep and Surfacing*¹, Martha and Lynda stand for realities which deal with solidity and fragility. Martha can cope with ordinary reality whereas Lynda is unable to do it and fights along with the inner strength of a prophetic and visionary power. So, the house provokes the meeting of opposed forces which dynamicize the questions about the importance of letting the mind know and of confronting what ordinary life demands. Martha and Lynda are the powers which will have to fuse in order to achieve a different "set of rooms and a different disposition of them".

Martha's most sincere desire is to work with the totality of herself. She tells Mark: "Yes. Any sort of life I've been offered in London - I'd have had to put half of myself into cold storage. Pretend part of me didn't exist" (p.149). Mark, then, writes the story of the inner and outer cities in order to better interpret Martha's need for integration.

The inner city represents the place of harmony and joy. It is carefully planned and its most distinguished feature is the quantity of gardens and the non-existence of a central building. There is only a suspicion that a nodal point exists under the city. In fact, people make a kind of centre and among them a

certain group becomes relevant - the gardeners. It is said that they feed and protect the city. But outside the inner city people fight for money, power and recognition. The outer city grows like a shadow and wants to conquer the secret of the inner harmony. But the answer to their persistent requests is not understood: "the secret could not be sold, or taken: it could only be earned, or accepted as a gift" (p.152). The soldiers from the outer city, then, come to kill everybody and to discover the secret place. But what they find is an octogonal white room under the library: the octogonal form which, according to Cirlot, symbolizes spiritual regeneration. Obviously, soldiers can not take advantage of this discovery. Only the gardeners care about the growth of this vital element. By feeding and protecting the city, they synthetize the need of protecting houses, streets and individuals. Unfortunately, the room is destroyed by an alien force which does not know the need of growth and of maturity in the process of development. No one can conquer spiritual regeneration: again "it could only be earned, or accepted as a gift" (p.152).

So, when we stop to review the main aspects of the first part of *The City* we notice that besides the importance given to the abilities of seeing and remembering, Mark's story is also fundamental since it illustrates the consequences of the use of force for the destruction of such capacities. When Mark talks about the inner harmony, he considers the gradual work on it and the necessities of this organic development, hence the importance of the figure of the gardener who, in opposition to the soldier, keeps and feeds what is most important: the self that expands in

the direction of the understanding of its capacities of wholeness and harmony.

In the second part of the novel, Martha approaches the inner life of the house. This movement is significant and demonstrates the way Mark's house claims her presence. The inner divisions among the people who live in this house is also a sign that many rooms and walls have to be visited, discovered and the experience apprehended.

The basement in the Coldridge house is seen, in the first part, as the groundbass - it was the one theme that had possibilities of development, of movement: "a growing point in this stagnant mess" (p.126). Indeed, the theme of the basement, in the second part of the novel, shows a fantastic rhythm and expression. Lynda Coldridge, Mark's wife, and Dorothy, a friend of Lynda's from the mental hospital, live there for a certain time. This "defensive unity" (p.188) charts its own space with the strict limit of the basement door. Their lives are also regulated by pills whose absence or lack of effect leads them to doctors. So, the basement is characterized as a fortress as well as a cocoon in its aspects of growth, defensiveness and fragility. Two human beings protect each other against the enemies from outside.

The rooms in Mark's house are especially significant when they become the setting of an active process of revisioning past events and excavating painful memories. Martha's process of recovery of her house in Africa characterizes the nature of an activity that links the past with the painful questioning of the real identity:

Soon she moved into the house. Room by room she created it, or rather, holding on to a detail, a cushion, the grain of a curtain light on a strand of thatch, she allowed the rest to come back... It was very painful. It was completely exhausting. Her stomach clenched and hurt. She fought. Who fought? (p.242)

It is also inside a room that Martha finds the necessary peace for the reading of her mother's letters and the excavation of voices, moments, scenes and aspects of childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The act of opening Mrs. Quest's letters "...started up in Martha, as if buttons had been pressed, or sluice gates opened, two violent, but opposing emotions. One was pity, strong, searing, unbearable. The other was a wild need to run - anywhere" (p.240). From this point onwards Martha knows that the work on these polarities is an imperative and that she can't work alone. She needs someone to help her.

Martha decides for a psychological treatment so that her doubts can be better discussed. But involvement with psychiatry is very conflicting. The overall situation of the treatment does not cause enrichment. On the contrary "'That's what they want', said Lynda, between clenched teeth. 'That's what they aim for: to make you a nothing-but'" (p.235). In this atmosphere there is a danger of being trapped in by the doctor. And this aspect can occur at the time of observing symptoms and general remarks of the patient. Lynda advises Martha not to talk about the two people: "Sometimes you are more the one that watches, and sometimes that one gets far off and you are more the one who is watched. But they look out for that, you see, and when you make a

mistake and say it, then that proves it. You're a schiz" (p.237). So, Martha in her attempt to work with her self will walk temporarily towards a consulting room where the most important components for a successful experience are lacking.

The most favourable condition for any relationship between people is that of equality. When one of the persons emphasizes the I-rather than the we, the disequilibrium does not allow the transexperience. The way I see the other, then, will determine my acts and my behavior and experience towards the other human being. Laing's belief in psychotherapy rests on the transexperience: "Psychotherapy must remain an obstinate attempt of two people to recover the wholeness of being human through the relationship between them" (p.53). But this is not the case of the treatment proposed by Dr. Lamb to Martha. Most of the time is dedicated to the building up of her fear, pity, terror until an explosion occurs. This process of "exploding" Martha's feelings is linked to Dr. Lamb's control of the right time for it to happen. So, by being the controller, Dr. Lamb refuses the experience with the patient. He sees Martha as an object. Exhaustion and emotionlessness follow this tiresome meeting with him: "she wept, she screamed, she shouted. He remained bland, unmoved" (p.248). So, in the general configuration of the treatment, Martha perceives the damage that is being done to a precious part of her, that part that means the beginning of the understanding of her totality: "And this process, submitting oneself to Dr. Lamb seemed to annul the other, the work prompted by the silent watcher" (p.247). When Martha talks about this part to Dr. Lamb, she says without fear "'The best part of me. The

only part that is real - that's permanent, 'anyway'" (p.249).

Through the description of the consulting room it is also possible to evaluate the disconnection between one being and the other:

There was no object in this room that connected with Dr. Lamb as a person, except, perhaps, the rug. For the kind of room that Dr. Lamb would choose, as a person, was not this room. When he put on that suit in the mornings, he put on his profession; when he came into this room, he entered the impersonal. Yet, if one could only see them, this room's air must be saturated, crammed with painful and violent emotions: years, probably, of anguish and terror were concentrated in it. The walls must be sodden, vibrating with them. Emotions. But not Dr. Lamb's. (p.244-5)

Interexperience, then, is an attitude that must be found outside the impersonal room. According to Laing and Lessing, psychiatry is not able to establish a real communication between psychiatrist and patient. It is clear that someone else has to do this.

Since the second part of the novel deals with this process of living inside a "cocoon", excavating memories and attempting to be helped by a "professional", I can't help mentioning the dangerous position of a human being that, for a certain time, neglected any kind of sharing with another individual. This person is Mark Coldridge. Through the rewriting of the manuscript of *The City in the Desert*, Martha perceives that one side of his personality, the 'Defender', has been adding many things to the original: "Reading this story with its recent additions, was like watching a battle between two personalities, one trying to take over another" (p.194). In a similar way to the inner and outer

cities of his story. Mark is confronting a new area of knowledge and trying to understand his self. Martha also realizes that these insertions are similar to those her lover Thomas wrote in his manuscripts while they lived in Africa. She knows that they come from the same wavelength: "From here, this place, Thomas had gone down into madness and to death. Mark? Well, this was one kind of a descent, of an entering in" (p.195). But it is exactly this descent that is valuable to Martha. Like her experiences of the dark soft empty space, on the street, and the silent watcher in Mark's house, she knows that Mark needs the confrontation with his reality: "She had understood once before that the new, an opening up, had to be through a region of chaos, of conflicts. There was no other way of doing it" (p.195).

The third part of *The City* is a continuation of experiences that started on the streets in London and on the veld in Africa in the first volume of the *Children of Violence* series, the novel *Martha Quest*. The development of the experiences is demonstrated now inside Mark Coldridge's house on Radlett Street. From the street to the interior of a house, Martha expands the knowledge of the self and limits the experience within a smaller spatial configuration. It is in the basement that she finds a center and grows along with Lynda Coldridge. There is another room, however, which stands for destruction and warning. It portrays concretely, through charts and maps, the power of annihilation that people maintain all over the world. So, the third part of the novel leads us to discoveries of the mind and to the voyage in. But it also shows that atrocities, war, famine, riots and nuclear weapons can easily annihilate the richness of the transexperience

inside the basement.

Perspectives and possibilities result from an effort to open up an obstructed and sometimes obscure way. The difficult process of discovery comes out of this act of trying an access through unlocked doors. These doors will lead to fantastic and frightening rooms as well as to houses full of revelation. When Martha perceives another dimension and starts listening to voices she is entering not only Lynda's territory but also her unknown country. First, Martha experiences an area of intense pain. It is a work with her memories, an intense and delicate movement towards the past. It is also an act of survival: "She had found doors she had not known existed. She had wrestled herself out of the dark because she had had to, and had entered places in herself she had not known were there" (p.312). The process of listening to other's voices is called "working" and it allows Martha and Lynda "the promise of an unlocked door" (p.386). In this new working,

They used their dreams, their slips of tongue, their fantasies, not at all as a Dr. Lamb might have wished them to do, but as maps or signposts for a country which lay just beyond or alongside, or within the landscape they could see and touch. (p.386)

The new territories they search for and whose experiences they try to share with other people are areas that many people despise and refuse to respect. Because of the disregard for perceptions, Lynda has been confined to mental hospitals many times. Lynda's and Martha's thoughts about society's prejudices reveal the real importance of madness as a process of revelation:

Perhaps it was because if society is so organized, or rather, has so grown, that it will not admit what one knows to be true, will not admit it that is, except as it comes out perverted, through madness, then it is through madness and its variants it must be sought after. (p.389)

But madness is a concept that does not always apply to people who have hallucinations and hear voices. In Mark's study room, walls are covered with the perfect picture of human "normality". Two enormous maps of the world portray the reality of the planet. With little red flags, Mark delimits the places where bombs are manufactured and where they are sold. Black flags indicate the factories that make materials for germ warfare and those which make drugs for the control of the brain. Mark also delimits the places where the products are sold. Yellow flags also call attention to the dedication to destruction: "areas of air, soil and water contaminated by bomb-blasts, fall-out, the disposal of radioactive waste, concentration of chemicals used for spraying crops, and oil discharged from ships" (p.309). On the other wall "...in varying colours were markers denoting War, Famine, Riots, Poverty, Prisons" (p.309). These walls might have been Laing's inspiration for a comment in *The Politics of Experience*: "Only by the most outrageous violation of ourselves have we achieved our capacity to live in relative adjustment to a civilization apparently driven to its own destruction" (p.76). The door to this room opens up the way for a sad reality maintained by those who call themselves normal. Again it is important to keep in mind that Lynda and Martha are also finding new territories. Unfortunately, the doors to them are usually

prohibited by those who only have eyes for annihilation.

The fourth part of the novel establishes a bridge between two forms of experience: madness associated to violence, and love to communion. Through Lynda's and Martha's experience with madness, regions of sound and impersonal currents, as well as with the terrors perpetrated by individuals and groups on other people, Lessing characterizes a world of violence and a possible world of communion and sharing. In this part of the novel, the fiction that Mark wrote becomes almost real. His inner and outer cities are present in the basement which turns into a place of conflict and of regeneration.

In the same way that two countries impose their distinction by the limits of their areas, habits, language, geography and history, two very specific countries have, in *The City*, their borders in the spatial configuration of a door. It is through the opening of this unlocked door that many acts of integration will occur. As I have already mentioned, Carol Christ distinguishes Martha's country as being the "ordinary life" and Lynda's as "the non-ordinary life"². Martha's act of passing through the basement door represents, then, the abandonment of her reality in order to merge, to fuse, to disintegrate her self in favor of discovery and rebirth. The process of dissolution of the barrier between the two women implies an attitude of sharing and interexperiencing. Their being as a unity occurs after an act of breaking a saucer containing milk. Lynda's impulse at throwing down a tray that Martha carries and the consequent breaking of everything to pieces starts the curious ritual where Lynda laps the milk that a broken piece still contains and where Martha does

the same symbolically. The ritual of communion stimulates not only the beginning of a process of knowing and of entering each other's minds but also the hope for the extinction of any kind of barrier.

The shape of the basement has also provided with meaning Martha's and Lynda's experience. Jean Pickering, in her article "Marxism and Madness", points to the symbology of quaternity as the archetype of the wholeness of the self in some of Lessing's works. Cirlot, in his Dictionary of Symbols, describes the square as having, psychologically, "the impression of firmness and stability" with its "frequent use in symbols of organization and construction"³. Another study on forms that Cirlot presents has to do with shape, when form explains the object. An object would correspond to moral evolution, according to its regularity or irregularity. An octogonal form would be, in terms of evolution, in a position between the square and circle. So, it is understandable the use of the octogonal room in Mark's *A City in the Desert* as a symbol of spiritual regeneration. In regard to the evolutionary stage of the square, Cirlot uses Jung's comment: "that the square, as the minimal composite number (symbolizing a situation), represents the pluralist or inner state of the man who is not yet at one with himself"⁴. When we then think about Martha and Lynda inside a basement room, we cannot forget that the urgent necessity of testing, feeling, checking, challenging, acknowledging, holding up and banging against the walls of the room is part of a task of passing from one stage to the other. It is as if the room, the form of the square, would correspond to a temporary stage in the evolution of these two female characters

to another dimension of knowledge, understanding and being.

Many objects inside the room are also indicators of a reality that favors revelation rather than concealment. A pair of shoes, for instance, reveals the presence of meaning in the disposition of objects: "a pair of shoes apparently left forgotten on a chair, if you examined them, carefully, took on the significance of a travelling gipsy's or an Indian's sign to friends or tribesmen: one shoe would be set at an exact right angle to the other" (p.500). Another pair of cushions points to the presence of two opposed forces inside the basement: two cushions are juxtaposed, one with "God is love" and the other with "a theatre advertisement showing a conventionalized Hell" (p.501). The presence and mainly the disposition of these objects take a significance like that of the meaning of life and the meaning of the voyage in. By being pointers, these objects signal the way of two women who have to confront, daily, the chaos and violence of the world as well as the way out and towards a new dimension.

In the process of discovery inside the basement, the spirit of a voyage is very significant in a symbolic force - that of the sea. Martha "could feel the swing and sway of the vessel and smell salt air" (p.507). The feeling of being under water or of looking at life from another dimension is intrinsic to the experience of knowledge, of understanding deeper areas. The vessel, then, is the channel into another dimension and represents the dynamicism of women who share and integrate: "Martha rested, face down on the carpet, eyes closed, her mind empty, as if she rocked in long waves inside a reef beyond which

crashed the roaring sea" (p.515).

In this roaring land, physical movements are particularly revealing. Movements towards or out of the space of confinement are important in what concerns the confrontation with external and internal realities. Basically, these movements correspond to earthing and sinking in Mark Coldridge's experience of leaving and entering the basement. Lynda's and Martha's movements, acts and gestures are much more circular, the around and around and around gesture of sensing and testing the walls.

Mark's acts of earthing and sinking are more than simple movements. They characterize the presence of solidity in certain areas of the experience and the lack of it in others. Martha, at the time of living near the basement, knows this more solid, and ordinary experience of life and, therefore, is closer to earth. Mark's question, then, starts the analysis of his position in this land of insecurity: he "had been driven upstairs by Lynda's nonsense, as it were, to earth himself in Martha? (p.499). He is not prepared for the responsibility of entering a new atmosphere and of experiencing a voyage: "He didn't want, or hadn't been able, to let go of ordinariness to sink himself into Lynda" (p.499). Movements, then, have a correspondence with the act of making resolutions: either Mark escapes or sinks in it, either he ascends or descends. Mark prefers to stay within the covered walls of his study room instead of following more dangerous ways. But both women go on and follow a path (or sink?) in a room of possibilities.

Lynda, in opposition to Mark, does not leave the place of discoveries. Her movements are characterized by the sensing of

visible and invisible walls and by the direction she takes towards them. Lynda bangs against the walls while being with her back to them and feels, senses and stares while staying with her back to the room. Her movements imply a belief in the change of the structure of these walls: "she pressed her palms against it in a desperate urgent way, as if doing this would cause it to fall outwards and let her step out of the room over rubble and brick" (p.501). But not only to step out is important. Lynda knows that discoveries demand deeper changes.

Lynda's experience inside the walls has been preceded by another outside them. She has been aware of the world of liars and cowards and of the importance of remembering a space usually referred to as "a clear lit space". She has been conscious of the importance of "not going to sleep" in a world of numb and poisoned people. She knows about her visionary powers and about the dangers of telling them to ordinary people. She has, indeed, been confined, doped and submitted to treatments in order to be cured since youth. Therefore, Lynda's isolation is very painful and any kind of act either of leaving or of staying demands the presence of a person who shares and lives the interexperience. Martha is this sister that tries to enter the mind of another woman and, with her, discover the way out of such pain. Lynda's question portrays the agony that is constant inside the house:

She was asking: why can't I get out? What is this thing that holds me in? Why is it so strong when I can imagine, and indeed, half remember what is outside? Why is it that inside this room I am half asleep, doped, poisoned, and like a person in a nightmare screaming for help but no sounds come

out of a a straining throat? (p.509)

So, the basement as well as the reality outside have to be transcended in favor of a reality that differs from both internal and external ones. In the hard work of sensing the walls, Lynda sees that the most important thing is not to forget the awareness achieved inside: "Remember, don't let yourself go to sleep, and if you go on always, testing the walls for weakness, for a thin place, one day, you will simply step outside, free" (p.509). And the room? It "will seem like a horrible little cell that an animal fouled" (p.509).

While such a hard process of discovery and understanding goes on inside the basement, the process of numbness occurs outside the house. Martha, who has always dealt with ordinary reality, becomes conscious of the dangers outside the basement while leaving it in a fresh morning. Her moments are glorious when she integrates herself with nature around her but the predominant moments while seeing human beings are terrorizing: "they were essentially isolated, shut in, enclosed inside their hideously defective bodies, behind their dreaming drugged eyes, above all, inside a net of wants and needs that made it impossible for them to think of anything else" (p.521). The condition of sleep-walking, of not being aware of others but only of themselves are so characteristic of people who live outside, in the "normal" world, that Martha can only feel pain and the desire to stay as long as possible inside the basement. From the comparison between the life inside and outside confinement, Martha realizes: "better mad, if the price for not being mad is

to be a lump of lethargy that will use any kind of stratagem so as to remain a lump, remain non-perceptive and heavy" (p.525).

But the price for not being heavy is high. Both women have to fast for long periods and have to stay awake as well. They have to concentrate on memory and on the functions of body and mind. Energy has to accumulate and the movements have to cease so that a different perception of the self is possible. Martha's "head became very clear, very light, receptive, a softly lit bubble above the violence of a body whose limbs wanted to move, to jerk, even to dance" (p.512). Besides this experience of lightness and understanding of the "core" of themselves, Martha and Lynda have to suffer the pain that many barriers provoke, especially the sound barrier. Martha's experience is "as if a million radio sets ran simultaneously, and her mind plugged itself in so fast to one after another, so that words, phrases, songs, sounds, came into audition and then faded" (p.513). Martha becomes sure of being a radio, of being able to contain different atmospheres and of receiving energy from different people, even from violent ones. With this perception, Martha questions the use and the danger of this machine: "But if the human brain could be a space probe or a moon-walker or a radar, it could also be a bomb or a disintegrator, and people would use it to destroy, they aren't fitted" (p.517). But there is a creature that uses this ocean of sounds and enters both women's minds: the enemy, the self-hater. This voice utters accusations and transforms their lives into hell. Their experience with this force is extremely important and demanding because it polarizes the experience in two main areas: the experience with the core, the "clear lit

space" of understanding and the experience with guilt, the destructive presence. The presence of the symbolic Armageddon and Jerusalem in the novel, when we compare their realities with the world inside the basement and the world on the street, corresponds to the forces of destruction and the forces of rebirth. Like Martha's experience with the crevice and the flower on a bulk of timber, no experience of growth can occur if the confrontation with terrorizing facts does not happen.

Martha's stay at Paul's house, Mark's nephew, constitutes another phase of her experience with the self. After spending a month in the basement, Martha goes to the top of Paul's house. There she plans to have once more the "intensity of packed experience" (p.550) she has had on the streets in London and with Lynda. She begins to sleep very little and decides not to eat. Martha is again the object of hatred of the enemy, the self-hater, and "galvanized by conscience" (p.551). But Martha discovers that, despite the intensity of the experience, she can use good sense in order to discern thoughts as well as to fight the enemy off. She perceives the place she is in, a kind of Bash country, and a two-faced presence inside herself. She is good and evil, the Torturer and the Tortured, the hated Jew and the German. Martha is also conducted by the Devil through the stations of the Cross. In this vision she is both Devil and Christ, living fully the experiences on both sides while undergoing a process of dissolution of the ego. Martha also has abilities of seeing facets of her personality marching past as well as understanding the capacities of her body, an instrument, a "receiving device" (p.564). In regard to this instrument,

Martha knows about the complexity of it and its function: "A body is a machine for the conversion of one kind of energy into another" (p.566). And the energies present in the process of self discovery reflect the nature of human beings who are products of violence: "If all these subhuman creatures are aspects of me, then I'm a gallery of freaks and nature's rejects" (p.567). Finally, still a bit undermined by the Devil, Martha decides to go back to Mark's house. She concludes that the experience she has had is very dangerous and extremely inefficient. She also notices that any person who manipulates others has to embody the self-hater. But Martha's discoveries lead her to the consciousness that she has not lost the watcher, the listener, the true self that once Dr. Lamb tried to undermine.

After returning to Mark's house, Martha dedicates herself to Lynda, who has been trying to have a healthy relationship with people. This relationship provokes an overwhelming crisis that leads Lynda to the hospital. An inability of experiencing and loving normally sends her to the world of pills, where everything is regulated by them. But an episode marks Lynda's effort to live according to what she really is. It happens in a kind of explosive revelation - a dream: "England was poisoned, she cried; some enemy was injecting England with a deathly glittering dew" (p.582). Lynda can finally utter the voices of the suffocated visionary powers. The woman who wanted to live in a marzipan house and who wished to marry either a farmer or a gardener is now liberating all of the energies in favor of a different life. The correct use of mental power is Lynda's instrument in order to overcome the annihilating forces of the self-hater. She has

always been the victim of a society that destroys the enemies of its "sanity". But the hope in the sisterhood of women, that Carol Christ emphasizes, is the starting point of transformation⁵. From the process of breakthrough to another of rebirth, Martha and Lynda find a reality of sharing and renewing contact among human beings.

Preparation is a keyword at the end of the fourth part of the novel. Mark is preparing a Memorandum which will advise people about future annihilation in certain areas of the planet. Mark is aware of the diverse possibilities of destruction and, like the walls in his study room, can not avoid pointing, demonstrating not only the tragedy but also the solutions in terms of organization. One example of preparation follows: "8. Locations must be found in parts of the world less vulnerable to contamination by wind, rain, etc, and prepared for large numbers of people" (p.597). The catastrophe, then, is predicted by Lynda and by Mark in a foreground of collective insanity and insensibility.

There is a moment, however, that reconciles Martha with her true self. This moment integrates nature and self and allows the understanding of the human being's "core" in an atmosphere of rich images. Martha is the protagonist in this scene that rejects the lethargic in favor of reconciliation.

She walked beside the river while the music thudded, feeling herself as a heavy, impervious, insensitive lump that, like a planet doomed always to be dark on one side, had vision in front only, a myopic searchlight blind except for the tiny three-dimensional path open immediately before her eyes in which the outline of a tree, a rose, emerged then submerged in dark. She thought, with

the dove's voices in her solitude: Where? But where? How? Who? No, but where, where... Then silence and the birth of a repetition. Where? Here. Here? Here, where else, you fool, you poor fool, where else has it been, ever...? (p.607)

Martha's moment of consciousness constitutes the beginning of a task that involves the survival of humankind. Only the preservation of the inner life and its sensitivity can help develop this consciousness into a visible act of sharing, transexperiencing and breaking through.

It is the Appendix of the novel that allows the consideration of the many forces that prevail in the novel and which grow not only to catastrophes but also to a revelation of consciousness and of the visionary powers of the human being. So, the catastrophe, the use of telepathic powers, the atmospheres in the island, the new race of children, and the gardener working at the outer city will be the main objects of study at the conclusion of the novel. They comprise forces of destruction as well as forces of reconstruction and belief.

The Catastrophe is the result of a total neglect of the dignity of the human being. In fact, people become poisoned not only by air, food and water but also by a process of corruption of sanity, of relationships and of experience. This decadence leads Great Britain to an atomic disaster and the population to the camps of refugees in the north of Africa and to islands in the north of Scotland.

In this salvage operation of mankind, people like Lynda are responsible in terms of prediction of and preparation for the catastrophe. In this aspect the use of telepathic powers is

basic. Lynda meets a doctor and a group of people who work correctly on visionary abilities and whose relationship is extremely benefic for their further behavior and action. Their working shall never cause panic. On the contrary, they have to prepare people and make them conscious of the importance of growing and perceiving new forms of hearing and seeing - activities that characterize a visionary person with telepathic powers as well.

Martha's place of refuge, after the catastrophe, is an island. There the group she lives with tries to keep the essence of simplicity and a healthy relationship. Their experiences, as we can expect, are supranormal:

...it was also during that year when we became aware of a sweet high loveliness somewhere, like a flute played only just within hearing... It was during this year that many of us walking along or in groups along the cliffs or beside the inland streams met and talked to people who were not of our company, nor like any people we had known though some of us had dreamed of them. It was as if the veil between this world and another had worn so thin that earth people and people from the sun could walk together and be companions. (p.658)

This experience restores the belief in a future to the human race. The feeling of being part of a group, of constituting a sane We which, according to Laing, is the starting point of transformation, is also present in their lives:

And the texture of our lives, eating, sleeping, being together, has a note in it that can't be quite caught, as if we were all of us a half-tone or a bridging chord in some symphony being played out of earshot with icebergs and forests and mountains for instruments. There is a transparency, a crystalline gleam. (p.660)

Their future becomes possible because of the children who are born on the island. Three of them are born mute but even in silence they are content. Other children have a capacity of hearing seldom achieved by Lynda during her experiences. They are capable of tuning to the voices of misery and suffering and end up crying and frightened. There is a boy who stays alone most of the time because the others will not let him behave freely. Another group has a habit of closing eyes because of the fantastic pictures they see. A characteristic among these children is their separateness into groups of hearers and seers while small and their later reunion when older. Their distinction from other children is that "they are grown up emotionally" (p.662). They have the authority and the knowledge of the history of the century. These seven children, four boys and three girls, are the guardians of the community and the promise of a new race after their scattering throughout the world. Martha's letter to Francis Coldridge, Mark's son, explains the black child's abilities and the promise they stand for: "He says more like them are being born now in hidden places in the world, and one day all the human race will be like them. People like you and me are a sort of experimental model and Nature has had enough of us" (p.663).

After Martha's death, Joseph, the black child, is sent to a camp in Nairobi. There the opinions about him are as depreciative as possible. He is judged and classified by Doctor Kalinde and commissioned to work with Francis Coldridge. M'tuba Selinge, head of a department, sends a letter to Francis mentioning the

doctor's opinion about the black child: "He classes him as subnormal to the 7th, and unfit for academic education. But fit for 3rd grade work. Perhaps you could find work on the vegetable farm? (p.664). Another official paper sent by Tsien Pu to Francis orders Joseph Batt's occupation in the camp: "It will be in order for him to inspect parks and gardens with the limits of seven miles from the city. No aliens are allowed outside that limit. It will be in order for him to attend courses on gardening" (p.669). With this process, Joseph Batt's future will be devoted to the cultivation of the land and to a sane relation with people. The business of gardening is also a reminder of Mark's story about the inner city and its secret guardians, the gardeners. And Joseph, in the land of Nairobi, will be the starting point of a new way of living that will rest with people who, like him, will use the deep capacities of consciousness, of telepathy and of prophecy in order to maintain, in Laing's words, in *The Politics of Experience*, the ego as "the servant of the divine, no longer its betrayer" (p.145). The soldier is present in Batt's world but hope rests with the cultivation of land and spirit and not with destruction.

Notes

¹Carol P. Christ, Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest (Boston. Beacon Press, 1986).

²Christ, p.67.

³Juan-Eduardo Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p.307.

⁴Juan-Eduardo Cirlot, p.292.

⁵Christ, p.73.

CHAPTER 4

BRIEFING FOR A DESCENT INTO HELL

Category:

Inner-space fiction

For there is never anywhere to go but in.

Lessing, Briefing for a Descent into Hell

There is a sentence at the beginning of *The Four-Gated City* that characterizes a rich period in Martha's life entirely devoted to observation and to the "excavation" of buried memories while walking. She is on one of the streets in London with Iris, her landlady, when she realizes: "With Iris, one moved here, in state of love, if love is the delicate but total acknowledgement of what is" (p.20). Curiously, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* starts with the presentation of a man's admittance sheet in the Central Intake Hospital in London. The disturbed, distressed and fatigued man has been found wandering near the Thames but no information about him is available in his belongings. Despite the man's distressed aspect, he and Martha Quest have points in common. First, both characters need to move and both novels suggest that sometimes the physical movement is a step to achieve something vital. The second thing in common is that the movement is never gratuitous. Martha and the man are looking for something precious and relevant, but lost, to their lives. And last, the attempt to unify fragments and to achieve self-knowledge leads to

attempt to unify fragments and to achieve self-knowledge leads to a different dimension - to the voyage in. Whereas Martha will move inside and outside the Coldridge house and will have Lynda's and Mark's company, the man will be confined to a place where the main interest is his "re-covery" and the "dis-covery" of his identity.

Besides this concern with the voyage in, the study of Briefing also demands a constant attention to two images as pointed out by Douglas Bolling in his article "Theme and Structure in Briefing for a Descent into Hell" - those of shallowness and largeness. According to Bolling: "Modern man lives not within the vital largeness of his psyche but rather within the constrictions and shallows of his socially conditioned roles and his ego; his is the hollowness and failure of spirit of the alienated and truncated"¹. When he comments on the thematic center of the novel, both images are again present: "The thematic center of Briefing is found in its exploration of man's psychic depths; the richness, mystery, and vastness of "inner space"; and the suggestion of modern (Western, European, "civilized") man's deadly loss of energizing contact with his own deeper dimensions".²

In *The Politics of Experience*, Ronald Laing emphasizes the journey in as a means of reaching the places that human beings have neglected. Experience is vital for the modern individual since without it he/she will live in a sterile earth. The experience of the journey, like the one the patient will start, implies the movement and, consequently, the knowledge: "This journey is experienced as going further "in", as going back

through one's personal life, in and back and through and beyond into the experience of all mankind, of the primal man, of Adam and perhaps even further into the beings of animals, vegetables and minerals" (p.126). To Laing as well as to Lessing, integration of scattered pieces of knowledge about the self will start happening as soon as the human being realizes that there is a necessity of completing a task, of doing something in favor of valuable and humane experiences.

After presenting Bolling's comment on the richness of the psyche and the limited world of the individual, along with Laing's belief in the integration of human being and nature through the healing voyage in, it is necessary to consider with attention the dialogue in Lessing's novel between patient and Doctor Y. after few days of confinement:

Doctor Y. You give lectures, do you? What sort of lectures? What do you lecture about?

Patient. Sinbad the sailor man. The blind leading the blind. Around and around and around and around and around and... (p.18-9)

This dialogue, and especially the three sentences uttered by the patient, are in intimate relation and may stand for the basic themes of the novel: first, the necessity of the voyage through the inner and rich dimensions of the psyche in order to outwit the limited realities of society; then, the importance of working intensely on the self with the help of some symbols: the mandala in the center of the stone city and the Crystal with its transparency, new dimension and upward spiral movement.

In Briefing there has to be a constant attention on the part

of the reader to the repetitiveness of the circle. Besides the circular structure of the book - we understand it as soon as we end it and go back to the beginning - the "Around and around and around" is present in meaningful expressions like "the snake swallowing its tail" (p.147) as well as in the vicious and repetitive behavior of institutions. It is this behavior that helps to characterize Bolling's opinion about the book - the form of "the left-turning or contracting spiral with its implications of 'destructiveness'"⁸ provokes the breakthrough of the patient into the voyage in. The character of fragmentation in society is manifested in individuals who need to break a repetitive relationship, a tiresome life. The experience that is so seldom lived is represented in Briefing through the work on some circles, the ascension to a kind of circle, and the abandonment of another one.

In Lessing's work there is always the attempt to integrate, to understand, to experience and to know. Consequently, my objective in this discussion of Briefing is to show the achievement of wholeness of the individual in the voyage in after a long and insipid life of fragmentation outside. My question, however, is whether a human being can retain the knowledge he/she has gotten if confined to a mental hospital at the time the voyage happens. By focusing on the circles and on the patient's three sentences I want to show that the movement is vital, but that Lessing still asks for other elements in the psychotherapeutic relationship which will avoid the repetitive and sterile formula of the treatment.

The word "sailor" has, in Briefing a significant

responsibility in what concerns directions to follow and attitudes to stand for. To understand this better it is necessary to read another dialogue by Doctor Y. and the patient:

Doctor Y. What's your name? Will you tell me?

Patient. Jonah.

Doctor Y. Yesterday it was Jason. You can't be either, you know.

Patient. We are all sailors.

Doctor Y. I am not. I am a doctor in this hospital. (p.14-5)

Sailor, here, is more than a profession and a way of life. It stands for a feeling of equality among human beings and points to a sense of "we" ness rather than the "I" ness claimed by the doctor. Along with the strong sense of "I" ness, the doctor is nameless and remains so until the end. This is to prove that a false sense of identity is present among individuals who seem to be self-assured. In fact, by being separated they tend to live in kinds of cocoons which, little by little, do not allow growth but the end of their sharing with other human beings. As a consequence, they can't be given a name and an identity. They are simply individuals among individuals who believe they are important. Identities, in Briefing, are blurred in what concerns the hospital as long as the relationships are not healthy. "We are all sailors", which seems absurd to Doctor Y., is like a route and a goal to the patient in the voyage in.

Recognition by society of this situation of false identities is rare. The hospital staff, for instance, wants to recognize the

patient's name without realizing their own condition. "Sinbad the sailor man" has to have a name in this world of "The blind leading the blind". When the patient's name is discovered with the help of some photographs, the staff starts a detailed investigation without noticing that the search unearths aspects of modern civilization and modern man as well. The staff does not perceive its blindness when themes like the education of children, the fallacy of archeology, the state of general sleepiness and the dehumanized relationship among people are discussed in letters addressed to the patient and brought by his wife to the doctors. Like the therapists, the patient, now called Professor Charles Watkins, is part of a professionalized and, consequently, fragmented world. In the world of Classics, he is not a special person due to the blindness that affects almost everybody. Recognition, however, of his true identity is part of the voyage in and during this process he is worth respecting.

Can a yeast not know it is a yeast? (p.49) is part of a letter written by Rosemary Baines, who attends one of his lectures some time before his confinement in the hospital. The presence of this character must be carefully regarded, for she knows that Watkins has a power to provoke and to enlarge people's curiosity about the world. Also, he has the capacity to touch sensibilities through the sound of his words. The atmosphere settled by Watkins during the lecture she attends is one of aliveness, awakening, enthusiastic recognition of possibilities through a simple idea: "Education means only this - that the lively alert fearless curiosity of children must be fed, must be kept alive. That is education" (p.152). Rosemary Baines experiences the feeling of

being "stung awake": "I remembered things I had forgotten for years. Before those 'prison shades' had come down. Before the trap had shut" (p.153). During this lecture and also after it, Baines knows that she has to remain alert and curious so that more things can be discovered through this fantastic yeast.

In this world of the blind leading the blind "Another flash of recognition (...) this quality of matching, of ringing together, of substances being in tune" (p.154) happens some weeks after the lecture. Rosemary Baines explains it to Watkins as being "'the wavelength'", "the high vibrating current", "the familiar becoming transparent" (p.154). She meets Frederick Larson, a friend of her sister and brother-in-law, in the University campus and feels towards him this "powerful kinship" (p.156). But what is important is that Larson has already met Watkins in one of his lectures and both Frederick and Rosemary have a wish to spread their ideas about the world they live in. This letter is a way of stimulating Charles for the actual meeting.

Rosemary Baines is curious about the relationship between stammering and awareness in Watkins' life. She writes about civilization in Britain in 1969 and about the science that analyzes civilizations considering things and artifacts - archaeology. The discussion about these points starts with Rosemary and Frederick, who start meeting frequently. Larson, who is an archaeologist, is struck by the way the news is presented: "...all events are equally important whether war, a game, the weather, the craft of plant-growing, a fashion show, a police hunt" (p.159). The belief in fairies, witches, magical plants and

animals is, curiously, constant in a technological society. But the important discovery happens while Larson is studying an African tribe, ten years beforehand: "Not only did this tribe's life centre on the flooding and subsidence of the river, but it was highly ritualized around the seasons, the winds, the sun, the moon, the Earth" (p.160). "Harmony, responsibility towards its members, lack of aggression towards neighbours" (p.165) strike the archaeologist's attention in such a way that the comparison between the tribe's life regulated by the river and society's dependence on artifacts, machines and possessions to judge a civilization become inevitable. Larson concludes that the tribe can not be judged by the pattern imposed by archaeology. But this conclusion leads him to a curious thing: he starts stammering during lectures although in normal conversation this does not happen. He thinks about leaving his profession, as well, since so many doubts appear. But, curiously, his doubts do not last long. After a time he is again with his habitual activities. A recent visit to Turkey, however, provokes the same old question about the validity of archaeological assumptions. Stammering starts again. All of these subjects are referred to Watkins for a very simple reason: he mentions during the lecture, that stammering has also been a problem and that no reason can be found for its appearing. By mentioning everything, Baines is trying to unite the three people in a common "'wavelength'". She feels that the "condition like extra wakefulness" (p.161) that is present in herself and in Larson can stimulate other people. Watkins can be one who, like them, has the same vibration. Now it is easier to understand the beginning of Baines' letter:

... in writing to you, this act of sitting down to put words together, in the hope that the words will be as strong as those used by you that night, it is like the spreading of a yeast or some sort of chemical that has started working in one place, and then moved out, feeding and inciting, then curved back again to where it began. This letter is like a snake swallowing its tail. (p.147)

In replying to her letter, however, Charles Watkins, does not recognize that something special is present in his words and in the conference in general. What he has said is usually repeated in many places. He knows Larson by name but unfortunately he has no time to meet them since his stay in London is short and he is usually busy. This letter, then, reveals Charles' character and his disposition not to share with his audience the contents of lectures and the significance of his performance. Watkins, the professor of Classics, does not know that he is a "yeast". Baines has answered her question correctly. "Can a yeast not know it is a yeast? I suppose so" (p.149).

The state of unrecognized relationships and of general indifference towards other human beings characterizes the behavior and the experience of many people. In Briefing, this characteristic is shown through Charles' growth from child to adult, but it stands clearly for the behavior of his generation. The state of sleepiness, as it is called in the novel, dominates thousands of people who are not aware of their condition, who can not see and perceive an inevitable fall. Sensibilities are numbed and many people have problems even to sleep. To avoid this problem, their nights are regulated by pills and so the nightly drug offers relief from the daily events. Most important is to see that thousands of people find no way to awaken during the

day. Sleepiness is a general state that is associated to blindness and whose results will be catastrophic. Charles feels the appeals of sleep since the beginning of his life. The mother and society, later on, are responsible for his unconsciousness and dependence on pills.

Charles Watkins' childhood is characterized by a confrontation between the mother and himself. He wants to be alive, energetic and perceptive whereas the mother wants him to sleep. Her discourse is a constant claim: be a good boy and sleep. The problem, then, is the inventive, curious and imaginary character of the child and the passivity demanded by the mother. The key word is "be good": "I'm off to their school now and I'm learning to be good. I'm a good boy now, I am quiet and good" (p.128). There is something, however, that the boy wants to discover in the dark territory of sleep:

But back in the dark in the deep of my mind is where I know the door is, back or forward, up or down, beyond the Boom, shush, the eternally booming, the pulse, the beat, the one and two, the one and two, through there, who knows which or where - I do, I know. I remember. Do I remember? Yes. I remember. I must remember. There. Where? (p.128)

But the mother finds a solution for his restlessness: pills prescribed by the doctor. "The small days flicker and the nights are killed dead with pills. But he sleeps well, he is healthy and regulated and good" (p.128). The mother stands for an institution which functions as a microcosm of society at large. Both expect him to be normal and cured.

Later on, the relationship of the family is replaced by

society's limited conditions. In consulting rooms and in many hospitals, thousands of people stretch out their hands and demand "Doctor give me pills to make me sleep" (p.130). The same happens with Watkins. He is also the victim of a society that prefers numbness to reality. In the voyage in he reproduces the horrors of the world outside when he claims for his drugs:

... give me now everything I had when I was a baby, give me what you trained me to need before I even talked or walked, give me anything you like but let me SLEEP for in the dark where the door once was (but is it still?) is the only place I can tolerate being alive at all. I never learned to live awake. I was trained for sleep. Oh, let me sleep and sleep my life away. (p.129)

The treatment with drugs during the confinement also has an element of death in its composition. The door that Watkins usually finds and which calms him is replaced by a more obscure and sterile place:

Shhhhh, hush, SLEEP and in slides the needle deep and down I go into the cold black dark depth where the sea floor is an earth of minute skeletons... dead plants, new earth for growing. But not me, I don't grow, I don't sprout. I loll like a corpse or a drowned kitten, my head rolling as I float and black washes over me, dark and heavy. (p.130-1)

This deadly place, in opposition to the promises of the sailor's voyage, represents the consequences of the dehumanized treatment of human beings by institutionalized norms. From childhood to adulthood the tendency is to kill activity and growth. So, sterility is part of the treatment since the beginning and is at its end. For the patient it is difficult to avoid the vicious

circle of repetition always present with its destructive power.

The circle is a strong image in the novel and is always associated to the dangerous and creative aspects of the voyage. The uroboros, the "snake swallowing its tail", the image that Rosemary Baines uses in her letter to Watkins, is the best example to illustrate these changes in the novel. "Around and around and around and around and around" (p.19) shows that the movement, the expansion and the contraction can not be absent when there is a task to be performed and a vicious circle to be broken. The uroboros and its two expressions will therefore be part of the voyage in and will help in the understanding of the sailor's difficulties and accomplishments.

Most of the things that lead Charles Watkins to his confinement have to do with repression in his "normal" work. A kind of destructive behavior is present in his ordinary life with family and colleagues. He works hard but is not sufficiently responsible for his students as human beings. At the same time his family lacks his presence due to overwork. His lectures are brilliant, but he is not kind enough to keep contact with his audience. There is also the matter with pills, the nightly drug. His confinement reproduces the same problems he finds outside: the difficult understanding between doctors and patient reflect, in the search for meaning in words, the sterile relationship among people. These facts refer to one of the uroboros' facets: the presence of the devouring, the Great Mother.

Mary Ann Singleton, in *The City and the Veld*, presents the Great Mother as a state of being where no responsibility or division is present. Singleton associates this state of being to

the unconscious and to the African veld in Lessing's stories. She says:

This is the paradise of childhood and of the human psyche before the ego developed, and man was separated from creation... However, the essence of this paradise is repetition; as long as unconsciousness continues (in a race or an individual), then the uroboros takes on its more sinister meaning as the devouring mother..." (8)

The devouring mother allows no individuality: everything is part of a whole in the cyclical repetition of nature. Singleton also refers to "instinct with no reason" (p.19) in the unconscious realm. But the city has a difference in comparison with the veld - "As citizens of the contemporary city, mankind is a victim of a second type of repetition, not of natural cycles this time, but the constant replaying of destructive patterns of behavior" (p.19). Destructive behavior, then, is part of the uroboros that encapsulates Watkins in the world outside and which prevents him from remembering his true identity.

Many events during the voyage in explain the sailor's obstinate attempt to be part of another circle - the other facet of the uroboros that, according to Singleton, symbolizes "'the creative impulse of the new beginning... the initial, rotatory movement in the upward spiral of evolution'" (p.19). With regard to this "upward spiral of evolution" it is important to keep in mind that the voyage in has a Crystal disc as destination. From now on Charles' steps will follow this direction.

Watkins and his eleven companions are engaged in meeting "Them" with endeavour: "Our expectations had been for aid, for

explanation, for a heightening of our selves and of our thoughts. ...the waiting to meet up with Them had become a circuit in our minds as well as in the ocean" (p.22). When the disc appears, light and sound invade their bodies and a conflict between different substances is established. But its disappearance leaves Charles, the captain, alone. His friends have been absorbed by this different element whereas he is left in a ship that is starting to rot. He has not yet left the repetitive movement for a different dimension of space and understanding:

For all these centuries I had been sailing around and around and around and around and around for no other reason than that one day I would meet Them, and now at last we had indeed inhabited the same space of air, but I had been left behind. (p.23)

Only the next events on the "safe" land of an island will explain the mysteries of the Crystal's and the companion's disappearance.

The island becomes the sailor's new territory and what he perceives, at first, is that "hostility or dislike has not yet been born" (p.40). He inhabits a paradise. When he finds a roofless city in a perfection of forms, with mosaics on the floors and light substances in its composition, he realizes that the city is inhabited by invisible workmen who maintain gardens and water channels in perfect order. But there is something he has to do in the center of the stone city: "I had to prepare this circle lying in its square, by clearing away all the loose dirt and pulling out the grass" (p.54). Charles also knows that he has to clear the center and then wait for the next full moon. What is revealed through the clearing of the center has to do with

universal forces: "patterns glowed in it, continuous geometrical patterns, that suggested flowers and gardens and their correspondence with the movements of the sky. Even in the thinning moonlight the patterns loomed up milkily..." (p.55). The moon and her cycles also affect the voyager in a different way: "I could not take my thoughts from her as she dizzied around the earth in her wild patterning dance" (p.57). Waiting for the next full moon and for the probable visit of the disc absorbs him so that he can not avoid a condition: "I was moonstruck. I was mooncrazed" (p.57). Meanwhile the sailor is confronted with an episode that changes the atmosphere on the island.

Watkins has never realized the presence of enemies. But when he smells blood on the air, he suddenly notices that he is responsible for the death of a beast among the cattle, that he has drawn evil into the island. The feeling of guilt upsets him: "I'll never know such grief, oh, I cannot stand it, I don't wish to live, I do not want to be made aware of what I have done and what I am and what must be, no, no, no, no, no, no, around and around and around and around" (p.60). All of a sudden everything changes - the city becomes alien to him and the night is a new terror. He is attracted by a strange feast in the forest and when he approaches it three women's faces, which are variations of a single one, greet him; they "laughed and exulted, and blood was smeared around their stretched mouths, and ran trickling off their chins" (p.63). The bloody feasts in which his sons participate and where a baby is murdered change the voyager's destiny for a time. Because he has participated twice in such feasts, he oversleeps and misses the Crystal's descent. In this

confusion of feelings the center of the city reveals a relationship between the circle, where the Crystal is, and the houses: "... they were turned inwards, to the centre; it was a city which had found its core, its resting place, in that whirl of intensity which laid claims on it and shot it through and through with its own fine substances..." (p.69). But after the Crystal's departure the morning reveals a frightening aspect of the city: "... its peace and silence had gone. It had a look of frivolity, a sort of drunkenness (...) a silly silent giggling, an infantilism, a coarseness" (p.70). A new terrorizing thing appears in the city too: rat-dogs and after them monkeys. With them the change in atmosphere becomes evident.

At Watkins's arrival the city is like a friend to him. Now, after the bloody feasts and the Crystal's descent, the city becomes a field of battles between rat-dogs, the masters, and the monkeys, the servants. The killing is stupid and robs violently both races from most of their members. The circle within the square is a kind of deposit of corpses and the water channels are red with blood. Watkins wants to clean the center but it is impossible because of the rat-dogs' presence. Then the white bird appears.

With the exception of rat-dogs and monkeys, the presence of animals in the voyage in is always peaceful and helpful. A porpoise that saves Watkins from the rotten raft and brings him to the island, two benign leopards that show him the way to the city, and this white bird, which has previously shown him pollution and destruction perpetrated by humanity, all signal the animal's territory as cooperative. When the white bird lands on

the center of the city, this time, it banishes those who are occupying Charles' place. Monkeys and rat-dogs leave obediently the center, and Charles starts the cleaning of the circle within the square.

In Briefing, the task of cleaning is an imperative that can not be neglected. While walking on the streets for the first time, Watkins understands the importance of restoring order to the center of the city. This structure is like a mandala, explained by Juan-Eduardo Cirlot as a kind of yantra, "instrument, means or emblem"⁴. Through the study of symbols it is possible to see the richness behind Watkins' cleaning. First, the square is related to everything that is terrestrial, that has a minimum of organization and structure and which is related to the seasons, the elements, the earth, the body and the cardinal points. The circle, on the other hand, stands for the other world, for the sacred, the divine. Charles Watkins is waiting for "Them" and wants to ascend to another dimension in spite of his knowledge of evil, of disgust and of horror. From this perspective, the mandala can be seen as a means of overcoming conflicts and a state of disorder, especially after the feasts in the forest. The moon's cycles incite Watkins for the work, too. The mandala, in Charles' situation, is the symbol of his attempt to reorder the vision of himself and of the cosmos. In Briefing, Charles' experience with the mandala corresponds to Cirlot's explanation about the structure and function of it: "It is, then, the visual, plastic expression of the struggle to achieve order - even within diversity - and of the longing to be reunited with the pristine, non-spatial and non-temporal 'Centre', as it is

conceived in all symbolic traditions"⁵. When the full moon comes, Watkins is ready to ascend. Inside the Crystal he will understand the meaning of his life in the city and the dimension of his task in the center.

The crystal is, symbolically, the place where opposites - matter and spirit - meet. This can be explained because of the crystal's state of transparency, which Cirlot defines as "one of the most effective and beautiful conjunctions of opposites: matter 'exists', but it is as if it did not exist, because one can see through it. As an object of contemplation, it offers neither hardness nor resistance nor suffering"⁶. In the novel, Watkins is "gathered" by it, in a swirling movement, "as a dust-devil gathers in dust and leaves from yards around" (p.88). Watkins' ascension to this atmosphere changes, consequently, the substance of his body and his vision of the world outside the Crystal.

Heaviness and lightness are elements that Watkins discovers while observing the city from above. They differentiate two cities that now he is able to perceive:

... as my own body was now a shape in light, though not as fine and high a light as the substance of the Crystal itself, so too was the city: it was as if the city of stone and clay had dissolved, leaving a ghostly city, made in light, like an illuminated mist that has shadows or echoes held in it. Yet the city that rose everywhere about me in the same shape of the city I knew so well was thinner, more sparse. (p.89)

Watkins sees that there are fewer houses in this "ghostly" city and that it is impossible for this light pattern to fit into some

buildings of the stone city due to "extra heaviness and imperviousness in their substance" (p.90). So, inner and outer cities have their spaces with their either heavy or light substances. This perception of the co-existence of opposites leads Watkins to a personal discovery.

Inside the Crystal, "a cold weight, a compulsion, a necessity" (p.92), which Watkins has already perceived in the stone city, manifests its pressures on Watkins. But now he is not afraid of his feelings: "It was a grief and a fear too ancient for me, it was a sorrow bred into the essence of the race. ...this was part of my living, kneaded into my fibres, a necessity like breathing and associated with it: this cold, this weight, this pulling and dragging and compelling" (p.92). Even the "bloody feasts" in the forest are understood by him as being part of his development, of his growing capacity to understand the world in its totality:

... my having drunk blood and eaten flesh with the poor women had been a door, a key and an opening, because all sympathetic knowledge must be that, in this spin of fusion like a web whose every strand is linked and vibrates with every other, the swoop of an eagle on a mouse, the eagle's cold exultation and the mouse's terror make a match in nature, and this harmony runs in a strengthened pulse in the inner chord of which it is a part. (p.92-3)

The inner and outer cities are examples of this fusion; like "a match in nature" they stand for the harmony now understood by Watkins. The movement, the constant change and dancing are part of this search for balance and without them sterility will repeat itself. In the context of Charles' voyage, it is important to be

part of this "locking together of the inner pattern in light with the outer world of stone, leaf, flesh, and ordinary light" (p.93). Only through this knowledge will he be able to see his task in the universe.

Having a good view of the planet, Watkins sees that movements and changes on earth are accompanied by the rhythms of sound and different tones and colours of light. Wars, famine and associations among nations are distinguished by colours and by beats, pulses of light. Professions, for instance, are not perceived through the colours of separate individuals. The whole rather than the human being is what matters. This fact creates a communion among professionals and overrides differences and fights:

... there is no such thing as soldiers but only Soldier, and not clerks but Clerk, and Gardener, and Teacher. For, since any category anywhere always beats on its own wavelength of sound/light, there could not be individuals in this nourishing web. Together they formed one beat in the great dance, one note in the song. Everywhere and on every level the little individuals made up wholes, struck little notes, made tones of colours. (p.96)

But something has happened to the planet and disturbed its order and harmony. The sense of wholeness reflected in the professions - the "We" ness - is substituted by an individualized and selfish sense of "I" ness. This "I" ness, on its turn, is responsible for the irresponsible and catastrophic behavior among human beings and gives place to the destructive movement of the spiral. Watkins interprets the change on the planet as being a consequence of a "blow or knock" (p.103). Charles' question "what

sent us off centre, and away from the sweet sanity of We?"
(p.103) is answered with a movement backwards:

I'm being sucked back like a mite revolving in the vortex of the bathwater, eddying into the mill-race, back, and then Crash! The Comet, it comes hurtling out of the dark of space, gives Earth a blow to midriff... leaving Earth no longer circling sane and steady... The air that had been the food of sane and loving understanding became a deadly poison... (p.103-4)

Watkins understands the terrible consequences of the cosmic unbalance and perceives that it is time to return from the voyage in to the world of relations, to the world outside since he has, now, the knowledge that can change many things in his place on the planet:

But man-wise, microbe-wise, I am before the Crash and in a cool sweet loving air that rings with harmony, IS, yes, and here am I, voyager, Odysseus bound for home at last, the seeker in home waters, spiteful, Neptune outwitted and Jupiter's daughter my friend and guide. (p.104)

Watkins' movements, at this point, involve the return not to sameness and repetition but towards the development of creativity and personal discovery. "Bound for home at last", he will have a chance of returning to his ordinary life with a different perception and knowledge of things. The creative movement, however, is part of a greater dimension and involves not only the human will to develop it. The creative movement is characteristic of the creative spiral, mentioned by Bolling in "Theme and Structure in Briefing". In his article, Bolling interprets the novel's structure as being a destructive spiral. But he does not

discuss full length the creative spiral that is trying to win its space. The creative spiral is mentioned in Briefing by Jupiter at the time he and Minerva are discussing the cosmic unbalance and the planets' disturbance, mainly the Earth. In this passage, Jupiter emphasizes the presence of the creative spiral in the whole universe, as if it were the predominant movement: "...don't forget that We, Jupiter, are not the only influence on the traveller's journey. No, it's a harmony, it's a pattern, bad and good, everything in turn, everything spiralling up..." (p.111-2).

The passages where the gods appear and where a conference is held reveal the true identity of some people who live on Earth and also Charles' mission on the planet. The reader learns that Watkins is a god and that he has been briefed for a difficult but not impossible task on the planet: he shall awaken people and incite them towards a different relationship in the community, in the country, on the planet. Consciousness and responsibility shall prevail so that the blind repetition shall cease. Watkins has his task brainprinted and will be born and live on the planet like everyone else. He only will have to remember, to keep alive his divinity. There is some good evidence that Rosemary Baines and Frederick Larson are also emissaries from this godly realm. Their awakening on the planet, however, will be terrifying: "You will be like a drowning person who drowns his rescuer, so violently will you struggle in your panic terror" (p.124). This is exactly the state Charles is found in at the time of his confinement. He has looked for revelation in Baines' and Larson's company but is so confused that no enlightened dialogue among them provides stability. When we discover that they have met, a

revelation in the last pages of the novel, the circle is closed. But the police finds Charles and the medical institution keeps him. The circle, the spiral, changes its direction, now toward destruction.

The medical staff, after prescribing many drugs only as an attempt to make Charles remember, gets impatient with his confused dialogues and strange adventures. The last attempt will be the shock treatment. But beforehand, Doctor Y. tries to make Watkins record some episodes of his childhood and adulthood. Charles talks, first, about his experiences in the war in Yugoslavia and then about an experience in the college court.

War, for Charles and his companions, will not end up in total annihilation of hope, and destruction will not prevail. There is an atmosphere of divinity among them and the belief that the land has not always been stained by blood and anguish. In a similar way to Martha Quest's experience on the island in *The Four-Gated City*, harmony will inhabit with them:

... this land that was so rich and so beautiful would flower into a loving harmony that was as much a memory as a dream for the future. It was as if every one of us had lived so, once, upon a time; at another time, in a country like this... among people descended from a natural royalty... We were all bound in together by another time, another air. Anything petty and ignoble was an outlaw, we could remember only nobility. (p.212)

In another passage, Watkins refers to a Golden Age: "the stars in their courses were on our side, whose victory would be at last when the poor and meek and the humble had inherited the Earth, and the lion would lie down with the lamb, and a loving harmony

would prevail over the Earth" (p.213). The future is not the new beginning but the time where the memory of an ancient promise will blossom. While recording some of his memories, the sailor of the voyage in is revealing his precious experiences with the divine and still unperceived contacts with the Crystal.

Charles' next record recaptures the memories of a time in college. The scenery is thus described by him: "The wall opposite my door is the retaining wall of the garden above it. Honeysuckle dangles down over this wall from that garden. Last summer the honeysuckle let down two long tendrils side by side, but separated from each other by about a yard" (p.242). The story of these two tendrils that try to reach a camellia is described by Watkins as if it were the story of his development, of his personal growth. Tendrils that are still young do not have the length to reach the pot where a camellia also grows. When the outer tendril clasps on the inner one so that they can reach the pot, the weight of both, or sometimes the wind, interrupts their grasping of the plant. After some months, Charles understands that time is responsible for the success of the tendril's attempt: "Time is the whole point. Timing" (p.245). Charles wants the doctor to see the importance of giving everything its own time: "The surfer on the wave. The plant swinging in the wind. And it's just the same with - well, everything and that's what I have to say, Doctor. Why can't you see that? (p.245).

Time in the hospital runs on a rhythm which differs from Watkins'. There is an urgency in "curing" people. Watkins has not yet recovered the memory of his ordinary life. He does not recognize his family and does not remember his work. But there is

an anxiety and urgency inside him which has a different source than the staff's. Watkins knows that time is running short for something he has to do:

"'There's something I have to reach. I have to tell people. People don't know it but it is as if they are living in a poisoned air. They are not awake. They've been knocked on the head, long ago, and they don't know that is why they are living like zombies and killing each other'" (p.248).

This dialogue between Charles and Violet Stoke, another patient and a friend of Watkins' reveals that both wish to evade the destructive spiral of repetition. Violet asks him "'But how can we be different? How can we get out? If you find out, will you come and take me with you?'" (p.248). He decides to try the way out through the electric shock treatment, believing that maybe this is his time: "It's all timing, you see. Sometimes it is easier for us to get out than other times..." (p.248). He thinks he will have a chance to remember, to integrate the voyage in and his previous experiences to the world outside confinement.

The spiral, however, moves on in its destructive course. After the first treatment with shock, Watkins remembers his identity but forgets his divinity and task. His failure is portrayed in a message to Rosemary Baines:

Dear Miss Baines,

I am sure you will be pleased to hear that I am fully recovered again, and so expect not to be such a burden on your continuing kind interest. Incidentally I have to thank you for your patience on the night when I inflicted myself on you in what was an unforgivable way. Please apologize on my behalf to Mr. Larson.

As I shall be back in Cambridge and extremely busy I am afraid I shall not be able to accept

your very kind invitation to dinner.
Yours sincerely,

Charles Watkins (p.250)

So, Watkins is finally "cured". He recovers the memory of his ordinary life and begins to live as if the voyage in has never happened. To sum up, he is "normal". He becomes the same repetitive and boring professor of Classics.

At this point two basic aspects have to be reviewed: the extent to which confinement has contributed to Watkins' growth as a human being and the characteristics of a normal and healthy individual. Laing has said, in *The Politics of Experience*, that normalcy is "a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection and other forms of destructive action on experience" (p.27). Considering Watkins' voyage in, it is true that "normalcy" in the ordinary world denies him the transference of the organized and transcendental structure of the mandala as well as the transparent spirit within matter of the Crystal to his reality. Watkins is manipulated by a reality of hallucinated "I" ness and destructive behavior. What should be done to transform this reality would be a change in the relation among people. In Charles' life, psychotherapy would have been important if some things had been respected: his time to grow up and his need for a sharing experience with the psychotherapists. The physician's love, Laing has said, is the basis for the patient's development. The replacement of this love by drugs and shocks is responsible for the patient's death in the normalcy of his pseudo-existence.

Notes

¹Douglas Bolling, 'Theme and Structure in Briefing for a Descent into Hell, in Doris Lessing: Critical Studies, ed. Annis Pratt and L.S. Dembo (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), p.135.

²Bolling, p.135.

³Bolling, pp.136-7.

⁴Cirlot, p.199.

⁵Cirlot, p.201.

⁶Cirlot, p.74.

CONCLUSION

The territories, the different "lands" and spaces that Lessing opens up in her novels provide a new perspective from which to approach true and healthy human relationships. They show that it is possible to undertake a voyage in to explore the rich but frightening aspects of human nature. These "lands" point basically to the possibilities of transcendence after the confrontation with the opposed experiences of fear and joy. Besides, the success of the voyage in depends on the way others see and analyze the experience a person is undertaking.

In order to summarize my analysis and show my ways to a central "land" of conclusions, I want to concentrate on three basic aspects of the three novels. First, I see the presence of two women, Freeman and Wulf, in *The Golden Notebook*, as a sign of different territories and experiences in Anna's life and as an indicator of areas of sterility opposed to areas of growth. Then, I consider, in *The Four-Gated City*, the basement door as well as the relation between the basement and the nodal point in the inner city in Mark Coldridge's *A City in the Desert* as limits between solidity and fragility and also as places of development. Finally, I understand that the task of clearing the circle within a square, in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, which leads to the knowledge of cosmic balance inside the Crystal, points to a potentially healthier behavior after the voyage in. In the three novels, we are confronted with the capacities of human beings to destroy opportunities for living harmoniously with others and

with the cosmos. But Lessing insists on showing that we can build upon destruction and learn despite conflicts with the self and the world. To our personal lives, Lessing introduces a tenacious and vigorous element of strength and hope. Our capacities to modify relationships and go in search of the meaning of life can be activated when we do not fail to face the experience that is being offered to us. Thus life becomes a voyage and an opportunity.

Along with this message, it is possible to recognize a chronological development in Lessing's way of presenting the divided self and the change of attitude toward schizophrenia in the context of the 60s. At this time, Ronald Laing is the mentor of the countercultural movement and establishes a discussion about the significance of being divided and "schizophrenic" in a world of deteriorating relationships. Lessing, in fiction, elaborates three different ways of organizing, or acknowledging, the significance and the consequences of being divided and of undertaking a voyage in. They are: the separation between raw and artistic forms, in *The Golden Notebook*; the merging of solidity into fragility, in *The Four-Gated City*; and the absorption of a man by the "spirit and matter" of a Crystal, in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*. Separation, merging and absorption in Lessing's three novels indicate development and show that the human being's courage and will to explore such different territories are threatened by the power of the science of psychiatry.

Despite the sterile forces that make her criticize whatever she writes, Anna Wulf is able to work on the black notebook and

show that it is possible to develop in the direction of light, of the power of creation as opposed to the dark forces of destruction. The yellow, the red and the blue notebooks indicate, along with the black ones, that it is painful to live in compartments and that we can assemble all of our characteristics in one "compartment". In Anna's case, the inner golden notebook reproduces and contains a period in her life dedicated to the raw and crude exposition of experiences. The voyage in with Saul means the abandonment of what is certain and secure and the exploration of what is frightening. When Anna says "And out of chaos, a new kind of strength" (p.454), we can be sure that the success of her voyage relies not only on Saul but also on her capacity to fight for a meaning in life. In this sense, when I say that Anna's two women, Freeman and Wulf, indicate sterility and growth as well as different experiences and territories, I believe in Anna's strength to cope with such women that are part of her. She has exposed the necessities of keeping a balance between the Anna who writes fiction and the Anna, protagonist, who is a social worker.

The balance between Wulf and Freeman is also suggested by the perception of two distinct forms within the novel. On the one hand, Anna encompasses both the four sections of the coloured notebook and the four sections of Free Women plus the golden notebook by means of a circle which links the sentence with different meanings: "The two women were alone in the London flat" (p.615 and p.25). The only part that remains outside the circle is the fifth section of Free Women. The separation between the squares within the circle and the last part of a novel are

meaningful in what concerns the study of the two women. Freeman and Wulf are together in the squares within the circle. This form is tentative, is a way of organizing opposed directions and feelings. I see in it the demonstration that it is more important to face conflicts than to avoid them. The fifth section, on the other hand, reveals a protagonist worried with social work and not with writing. The closing sentence says: "The two women kissed and separated" (p.638). But what is very important in *The Golden Notebook* is the way Lessing points out the necessities of not avoiding either unfinished or artistic forms. The opposition and separation between the squares within the circle and the fifth part of *Free Women* illustrate both in form and in content the belief in the co-existence of opposites. Anna is not able to annihilate the Wulf that is part of her and has to fight in order to protect and save the Freeman. The only ways to understand her divisions and the painful experiences with dreams and invasions by alien personalities is the organization of experiences in two different areas: Freeman/Wulf and Wulf. The Wulf can be easily deciphered whereas the Freeman will always show the necessity of living intensely, painfully when necessary, but most importantly, with the dignity of being human. Thus we understand that for Lessing, as for Laing, human beings must not forego any opportunity to grow, to develop the awareness that only harmony will save relationships and life on the planet.

The publication of *The Four-Gated City* brings with it a new way of looking at the "schizophrenic". Considered a visionary person, the schizophrenic nevertheless suffers intensely with such unusual experiences. With Martha's and Lynda's experiences

in the basement room, Lessing opens up a territory of work within the "walls of the mind". Martha carries with her the power of dealing with ordinary life whereas Lynda can offer the immense areas of sensitivity, supranormality and the work on the self and its potentialities. Like the nodal point in the center of Mark's inner city, the basement room will be the setting of transformation. The octogonal room in the inner city points to spiritual regeneration while the basement room indicates transcendence after the voyage through its walls and crashing floors. The voyage in re-unites terror and beauty and gives place to the merging of Martha's solidity and Lynda's fragility. The Four-Gated City, in this sense, indicates the importance of voyaging with another person and of allowing the fusion of two identities in the direction of a common view. It is very important to stress that this understanding of the possibilities of development is not easily achieved. The use of violence, as in the case of the soldiers from the outer city, proves disastrous. We have to keep in mind that the secret of the inner city "could only be earned, or accepted as a gift" (p.152). In this novel, Lessing gives artistic form to the view that only those who take care of the best part of themselves, a kind of "nodal point", will have the strength to build upon ruins and modify relationships which have long been structured on egotism and violence. The center of the inner city shows that we are not ready for a different world and that there is still a lot of work to do on ourselves.

Charles Watkins, in *Briefing*, knows the importance of clearing the center of the stone city. The importance of the

task, in this novel, may be compared to the conquering of the secret of the octogonal room in *The Four-Gated City*. In *Briefing*, however, Watkins is gathered, absorbed by a Crystal that modifies the notion he has of his body. In this realm, Charles realizes that the body is not as important as the dimension of the mind. He knows that his mind lies side by side with others and that the notion of wholeness and integration is very important in this new atmosphere. The consciousness of areas of heaviness and areas of lightness in the stone city make him direct his thoughts to the importance of cosmic harmony. But when he feels a weight of coldness inside the Crystal, he realizes the importance of the bloody feasts on the island which indicate the presence of evil. They are like doors that help him understand the significance of the experience with division. The importance given to the mind and to integration, inside the Crystal, gives a characteristic of divinity to Watkins. He is part of a new substance and atmosphere: "Thought... I was thinking... the Crystal was a thought that pulsed and spiralled" (p.90). Watkins, however, has another task besides that of clearing the circle within the square. After the voyage in, he knows that he has to remember a very important thing. That task he has always wanted to remember presupposes the keeping of the Crystal in his mind. But Watkins is the character who most fails in the attempt to transpose the reality of the voyage in to the ordinary reality. His Crystal is violently broken and disregarded by the psychiatrists.

The change from the formal separation of experiences in *The Golden Notebook*, to the personal merging and absorption in *The Four-Gated City* and *Briefing*, respectively, illustrates Doris

Lessing's development of the meaning of being divided, of voyaging in, and of being schizophrenic. The richness of the experiences in the three novels sustains the idea that these "schizophrenic" or divided characters are much more dynamic and courageous than the "normal" people. The progression of the idea, during the 60s, that the schizophrenic has much more to teach than to be taught is proved in Lessing's three novels. The ultimate aim for Lessing is a development towards absorption by the Crystal, but at the same time the science of psychiatry works against the achievement of this goal. Laing says that "They" will try to cure us and bring us back to the ordinary reality of falsity, individuality and repression, but that there is hope that "they" will not succeed. In *Briefing*, however, the power of psychiatry is strong enough to prevent the voyager from remembering an important task on the planet. With his failure, we are confronted with the painful reality of relationships where the other is seen as an object of study and not as an individual that needs attention and respect.

The routes to annihilation follow different ways. In *The Golden Notebook*, Mother Sugar helps Anna to feel again. But her consolation offers less energy and tends to lead Anna to the safe and established interpretation of dreams. Anna refuses to receive such a large amount of sugar and decides to fight for the conquering and understanding of the Freeman besides the Wulf. Lynda, along with Dorothy, a minor character in *The Four-Gated City*, is constantly submitted to shock treatments, drugs and pills. Their confinement in hospitals is a sign of the lack of understanding of their most intimate necessities. Martha is

interested in a psychotherapeutic treatment but quits seeing Dr. Lamb because of his attempts to destroy her personal discoveries. Fortunately, Lynda gets to know a group of therapists that work on her telepathic abilities. It is a work that enhances the importance of not imposing a set of norms and obligations to people who feel and react differently. In *Briefing*, the consequences of shock treatment to the sailor who has just experienced the voyage in are catastrophic. Doctors X. and Y. do not allow him the time to remember the *Crystal*, thus destroying the most important experience with the cosmos and its harmony. But far from being pessimistic, Lessing's development indicates a new reality and a different order if only human beings are respected and dignified in their individuality and in their participation in the community, country and planet.

The necessities of true human relationships and healthy ways of dealing with those who are in conflict with the world and with themselves give to Lessing's works a connotation of involvement, intense work, and a different way of perceiving the world. Lessing builds upon what has been destroyed in the psyche and in relationships and believes in the continuation of our voyages in the direction of safe harbours. Anna says: "I want to be able to separate in myself what is old and cyclic, the recurring history, the myth from what is new, what I feel or think that might be new..." (*GN*, p.459). Martha sees with delight that a hulk of timber can allow the growth of a flower: "Turning right, she greeted the slab or hulk of timber. In the less than two days since she had seen it, a minute yellow flower had emerged from a crevice" (*FGC*, p.86). Watkins, likewise, has the awareness of our

human possibilities: "We are all sailors" (B, p.15). With the understanding of our capacities to know the voyage in and transcend it in favor of others, there will be no need to impose the presence of the I. Laing makes clear that a false sense of identification among people leads to a general state of unreality in relationships. He uses the image of the ghost to illustrate one side of the catastrophe when "we", a false and destructive group, take control of the other's reactions and label or classify "them": "The tremendous social realities of our times are ghosts, specters of murdered gods and our own humanity returned to haunt and destroy us" (TPE, p.73). Charles Watkins, diagnosed as "schizophrenic" by the psychiatrists, becomes this "specter of a murdered god" when he leaves the mental hospital.

To critic Marion Vlastos in "Doris Lessing and R.D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy", Charles Watkins is an example of failure. She considers his voyage less meaningful than Jesse Watkins' whose case is recorded in Laing's *The Politics of Experience*. But Vlastos forgets that there is a pair which has control over Charles's reactions, Doctor Y. and Doctor X., whereas Jesse Watkins undertakes the voyage in alone. Charles' psychiatrists belong to a group, a profession, an institution and believe they have the right to control "less privileged" individuals. They know what drugs to administer, how to classify patients and the right moment to set them free. They have the endorsement of society at large to diagnose human beings. As a consequence of such falsity and blindness, Laing and Lessing call for a redefinition of the meaning of groups, professions and identities. They stress that our egotism and lack of involvement

in matters that include human beings, nature and the planet will inevitably lead to a catastrophe. Our "I" ness has made us, paradoxically, afraid of knowing what we are individually. Maybe there is a lot to be remembered but we have never tried to start. The fear of looking for flowers in ruins inhibits our capacities to fight for the discovery of true relationships and a healthy bond among ourselves. The voyage to inner space and time, in this sense, is the beginning of a new understanding of our presence in the universe. When we transcend the voyage in in favor of others, there is no need to impose the presence of the I. There is only the freedom of saying "Our names are not important. We are all sailors. We have a common interest and a common destiny".

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